# MEDIEVAL THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS

## Poetry, Hypothesis, and Experience in the European Middle Ages

Edited by
Philip Knox, Jonathan Morton, and Daniel Reeve

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# Medieval Thought Experiments

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Volume 31

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## in the European Middle Ages

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Jonathan Morton

Fictions conjure up imagined scenarios, plausible to a greater or lesser degree, that demand an affective response at least as much as an intellectual one. That response will vary according to the individual, and the same individual will respond differently depending on the circumstances in which she receives the text, be they contextual, biographical, or even physiological. The same person rereading a novel after a thirty-year interlude (or even a thirty-day interlude) will react differently to the narrated events that the text's reading presents to her mind. Responding to a fiction — that of a novel, of lyric poetry, say, or of any other literary art — thus entails a certain engagement with the changeable self and its individual experiences. Conclusions or lessons drawn from such imagined scenarios will not follow from them out of necessity but rather out of a necessary contingency and will always be marked by difference.

At first glance, fiction and philosophy seem not to be closely aligned. The fictional, understood as broadly as possible, sees its opposite in the procedures of logical deduction. For Aristotle's seminal *Posterior Analytics* the most certain kind of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη in the ancient Greek, *scientia* in the medieval Latin tradition) is that which is deduced necessarily from principles known

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with certainty, the clearest examples being mathematical propositions.[1] The contingencies of the self and its lived experience are wholly irrelevant for the production or recognition of this kind of knowledge. However, the hypothetical scenarios of imagined fictions demand different kinds of thinking, even if it is not easy to make explicit precisely what they are or how they work. One way of articulating the concern of this book is to ask the question, what does the imaginary do to (or do with) the demonstrative? As will be seen, this is precisely the issue underlying the usefully problematic term 'thought experiment', taken as a starting point by the essays collected here. The shared focus of these investigations is the particular cultural environment of the medieval period in Western Europe — a period still sometimes imagined by non-specialists to be characterized by rigid logic in its intellectual life and a staid formalism in much of its artistic life. In the first instance, it is hoped that the book's approach offers useful ways of reading the medieval philosophical, literary, and devotional texts under scrutiny. But, more broadly, the aim of gathering together the essays in this book is to demonstrate the importance of the Middle Ages for a more general understanding of the kinds of philosophical work done through the use of fictions. The terms 'philosophy' and 'fiction' are, of course, contested and variable, and are operative beyond the disciplines of the history of philosophy and literary studies, respectively.

In the preface to the 1976 edition of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, science-fiction author Ursula Le Guin, inspired by Nietzsche, characterizes philosophy and fiction as the poles of Apollo and Dionysios.[2] In so doing, she suggests fiction as a kind of verbal truth-telling through falsity that cannot, a priori, be assimilated into propositional, provable statements:

> It is words that make the trouble and confusion. We are asked now to consider words as useful in only one way: as signs. Our philosophers, some of them, would have us agree that a word (sentence, statement) has value only in so far as it has one single meaning, points to one fact which is comprehensible to the rational intellect, logically sound and — ideally — quantifiable.

> Apollo the god of light, of reason, of proportion, harmony, number — Apollo blinds those who press too close in worship. Don't look straight at the sun. Go into a dark bar for a bit and have a beer with Dionysios, every now and then.

> I talk about the gods, I am an atheist. But I am an artist too, and therefore a liar. Distrust everything I say. I am telling the truth.

[1] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, i. 1–2, 71a–72b.

[2] See Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. by Smith.

> The only truth I can understand or express is, logically defined, a lie. Psychologi-
> cally defined, a symbol. Aesthetically defined, a metaphor.[3]

At the same time that Le Guin articulates how artists, makers of verbal fiction, use mendacious or at least ambiguous speech to convey meanings that are not solely rational, she also performs it. Her depiction of Apollo and Dionysios is made at least partially indistinct through its metaphoricity, through its mendacious artistry, so that her argument is more artistic than strictly philosophical, encouraging a Dionysian pleasure in the textual ambiguity whose metaphors share alcohol's power to intoxicate and to disorient.

Le Guin's provocative invitation prefaces a novel in which a traveller encounters a planet whose inhabitants are without fixed gender divisions, and which could therefore be characterized as a kind of thought experiment: How would an absolute fluidity of gender affect human society? While acknowledging this ('If you like you can read it, and a lot of other science fiction, as a thought-experiment'),[4] the preface throws up questions of what a thought experiment is, suggesting that fictions, while experimental, are by no means analogous to experiments in a modern laboratory or even necessarily to the thought experiments of scientists or philosophers. Her verbal art will not be distilled into a single, unambiguous meaning, implying that flights of the imagination are rarely linear or simply teleological and are unlikely to provide tidy answers.

There is not a clear consensus on what exactly constitutes a thought experiment or even what its specific purpose is, in the modern period or in the past.[5] It is possible to say, however, that, broadly understood, a thought experiment is a hypothetical scenario whose existence may or may not be achievable in reality and whose description aims to convince its audience of a particular scientific or philosophical principle.[6] In 1632, Galileo used the thought experiment of the cabin in a large ship to justify his model of the Earth's rotation, countering the argument that the planet's spinning on its axis would affect the movement of bodies on its surface and thus that the absence of any such observable

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[3] Le Guin, 'Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*', p. 132.

[4] Le Guin, 'Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*', p. 130.

[5] For more detailed discussion and bibliography about the nature and history of thought experiments than is possible here, readers can consult Frappier, Meynell, and Brown, *Thought Experiments in Philosophy, Science, and the Arts*; Horowitz and Massey, *Thought Experiments in Science and Philosophy*; and Ierodiakonou and Roux, *Thought Experiments in Methodological and Historical Contexts*.

[6] Roux, 'Introduction', p. 4.

effect shows that the Earth does not rotate. In Galileo's thought experiment, the observer will be in a cabin below deck observing a series of natural phenomena: fish swimming in a bowl, a bottle emptying drop by drop into a basin, the flight of animals and insects. Regardless of the speed of the ship, as long as it is uniform all creatures within the cabin will be moving simultaneously at the same speed and there will thus be no observable difference in their movements compared to how they would be in a perfectly still cabin.[7]

The cabin is a kind of imaginative, fictional space in which readers can picture themselves observing the effects of various physical experiments. Instructions to an audience to 'imagine that' certain conditions apply or to 'picture yourself' in a given scenario make clear the heuristic and rhetorical force of such thought experiments that aim to convince through plausibility rather than to prove through demonstration.[8] In her invaluable introductory account of the history of thought experiments, Sophie Roux brings out both the imagination's need for detail to visualize a given situation and the contradictory importance of being able to use that situation to derive an abstract principle not dependent on its contingent details:

> Thanks to these concrete scenarios, thought experiments have an attraction that we might call aesthetic and that may involve our imagination. They are, however, more like sketches than realistic paintings: we must strip them bare and isolate the significant details of the problem in question, so as to draw a conclusion that goes beyond the specific case described.[9]

There is, then, a tension: the imaginative aspect of the experiment demands details to be more convincing or affective, while theoretical conclusions, to have anything approaching a demonstrative force, demand sparsity, and the level of detail relates directly to the security of any conclusions drawn from a thought experiment. This tension lies at the heart of all of this volume's investigation of the textual phenomena that, for the moment, we will term 'thought experiments'. There will be different kinds of thought and different kinds of experimentation according to the narrative detail of the scenario, when it is 'thin' as in Judith Jarvis Thomson's ethical example of the unconscious violinist in need of a blood transfusion,[10] or novel-length as in *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

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[7]  Galileo, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, pp. 186–88.

[8]  Frédérique Aït-Touati refers to such a procedure as the 'poetics of the credible' in *Fictions of the Cosmos*, p. 11.

[9]  Roux, 'Introduction', p. 23.

[10]  See John Marenbon's essay in this volume.

Thought experimentation in its various forms is a far more common phenomenon than we might think at first. In his short essay 'On Thought Experiments', physicist Ernst Mach sees such imaginative exercises not simply as a necessary stage in scientific discovery, a precursor to physical experiments, but as a mode of reflection fundamental to human thought:

> The planner, the builder of castles in the air, the novelist, the author of social and technological utopias is experimenting with thoughts; so, too, is the hardheaded merchant, the serious inventor and the enquirer. All of them imagine conditions, and connect with them their expectations and surmise of certain consequences: they gain a thought experience.[11]

In this light, the scientific thought experiment becomes one of a range of imaginative procedures that allow for a kind of thinking not limited to the strictly empirical, the strictly possible, or even the strictly logical. Imagined or fictional scenarios can lead to thought about physics, metaphysics, semiotics, politics, or ethics, although in ways that are not limited by the burden of demonstrative proof needed for *scientia* and that lack *scientia*'s authoritative certainty.

How does such a tension work in the particular context of the high and late Middle Ages? In Western Europe in the period from *c.* 1100 to *c.* 1500, the study and practice of logical deduction formed the backbone of the philosophy, theology, and pedagogy that dominated institutions of learning, especially after the translation of all of Aristotle's treatises on logic into Latin in the twelfth century. Since the sixteenth century, medieval thought, understood principally as the texts and practices grouped under the sign of scholasticism, has been characterized (often unfairly) as rigidly logical, marked by a particular loyalty to the principles of deduction outlined in Aristotle's works on dialectic.[12] Despite the prevalence of logical deduction from textual authority, alternative modes of thinking were widespread both in scholastic culture and outside it, often in unimpeachably orthodox scholastic texts. Much of this thinking took place in the domain of fantasy, in the mental landscapes that were generated to varying degrees of detail or complexity through textual fictions. In the self-conscious use of imaginary scenarios, analytical and imaginative thought processes could produce different ways of knowing to the probable opinions and certain knowledge of Aristotelian deduction.

A more empirical episteme, based on physical experiments and self-consciously departing from a medieval overvaluation of logical deduction and

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[11] Mach, *Knowledge and Error*, p. 136.

[12] De Libera, *Penser au moyen âge*, pp. 36–38.

textual authority, would be the hallmark of sixteenth- and seventeenth-cen-
tury scientific thought in the period that came to be known as the Scientific
Revolution.[13] As demonstrated by Galileo in the seventeenth century and
Mach at the end of the nineteenth century, such physical observation did
not preclude thought experiments, and in fact, as Mach notes, the imagined
thought experiment is a necessary precondition for any physical experiment.[14]
Clearly, however, in the period discussed in this book, in which experimental
science is almost wholly absent, imaginative experiments will occur differently
to how they will at a time when they can be modelled, however loosely, on
physical experiments.

So, were there thought experiments in the Middle Ages? This book makes
no attempt to provide an exhaustive history of the thought experiment in
this period, nor does it seek to make the claim that a continuous genealogi-
cal line can be drawn between the examples discussed here and the kinds of
thought experiments discussed by historians of science or analytic philoso-
phers today. The term itself is not used in the Middle Ages, and inventing a
genre of 'the medieval thought experiment' would fall into the trap of anach-
ronism.[15] Rather, we are employing the term as a provocation, as an invitation
to think about the many different ways in which the hypothetical and the fic-
tional could be used as tools for thought. Different chapters discuss imagina-
tive fictions across a range of medieval texts, especially works of poetry but also
those better classified as scholastic philosophy and theology, vernacular ency-
clopaedic pedagogy, or religious meditations. They share a concern with the
kinds of thinking and feeling that can take place when questions of truth are
approached through fascinating or pleasurable lies or through the generation
of imaginative, hypothetical situations, as well as how such responses could be
understood by medieval thinkers. Taken together, these studies of medieval
texts and textual practices form a collective inquiry into questions that arise
from Le Guin's preface about the uses of fiction and hypothesis that have par-

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[13] Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution*, pp. 68–72.

[14] Mach, *Knowledge and Error*, p. 136.

[15] There are medieval examples of thought experiments, according to the everyday under-
standing of the concept, in the study of the physical world, for example, notably the hypothetical
vacuum in Jean Buridan's *Treatise on the Void*, discussed in Grant, 'Medieval Natural Philosophy'.
See also Grellard, 'Thought Experiments in Late Medieval Debates on Atomism'; Knuuttila and
Kukkonen, 'Thought Experiments and Indirect Proofs'; Lautner, 'Thought Experiments in the
*De Anima* Commentaries'.

ticular relevance to the history of thought in the High Middle Ages.[16] What kind of truth can be suggested through artful lies and imagined worlds? To what uses can irrationality be put in the service of knowledge? To what extent can imaginary situations allow unconventional or impermissible ideas to be tested and explored?

One particularly medieval aspect to the hypothetical thinking under discussion here is the concern less for the natural world itself than for the limitations and potential of the embodied subject. The situations of medieval thought experiments involved staged, fictionalized debates or personal visions far more than they did the observation of physical phenomena in hypothetical conditions. The result, as will be seen throughout the essays collected in this volume, is a continued attention to the experience of thinking itself, to the desire to know that is proper to human nature, complicated by the pains and pleasures of sensual and affective experiences that can themselves offer particular paths to knowledge.

Such hypothetical situations occur most vividly in the proliferation of medieval vernacular dream poetry, especially in the tradition of the thirteenth-century *Romance of the Rose*, in which abstract personifications such as Reason and the Lover can argue over questions of psychology, ethics, and signification. The ambiguous dream-space allows for ideas to be asserted without sincerity and for different positions to be placed in potentially unresolvable tension. Such hypothetical scenarios, pedagogical or antagonistic, recur in more thinly sketched scenes of encounter, such as the master/student dialogic frame of encyclopaedic primers, such as Honorius of Autun's *Elucidarium*, or imagined debates, such as Peter Abelard's *Collationes*, in which a pagan philosopher disputes first with a Jew then with a Christian.[17] It might even be possible to locate the barest traces of an imagined scene of intellectual antagonism in the framework of the *quaestio disputata*, the classroom debate practice often recorded or repeated in written texts.[18] For each question, a problem is raised and resolved by the master who responds to positions put forward by an opponent before countering that opponent's various arguments in turn. At the opposite end of the spectrum of imagined mental spaces are Cistercian meditative practices in

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[16] Recent works on these topics include Denery, Ghosh, and Zeeman, *Uncertain Knowledge*, Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, and Greene, *Logical Fictions*.

[17] See Marenbon's essay in this volume.

[18] Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation*; Weijers, *'Queritur utrum'*.

which monks are enjoined to picture vivid scenes in their minds to produce ethically improving imaginative visions.[19]

In order to make it easier to compare diverse texts that make differing imaginative uses of thought experiments alongside each other, it is useful to unpack three other terms from this book's title, 'hypothesis', 'poetry', and 'experience', informed by their use in medieval rhetorical and poetic theory to refer to the textual practices of verbal artifice. First, the hypothesis is the particular concern of the discipline of rhetoric, the art of eloquence or of persuasion, according to one of the Middle Ages's most important authorities on the subject. In the fourth book of the *De topicis differentiis*, Boethius distinguishes between the arguments made in dialectic, the art of discerning truth from falsehood, and those in rhetoric, which aims to move and to persuade audiences. While there are important differences in the methods used in each, the most profound distinction comes from the subject-matter proper to each discipline. Dialectic deals with theses, questions of principle untroubled by a specific context, whereas rhetoric deals with hypotheses, which are questions that are not universal but are conditioned by the specific circumstances of a question.[20] A hypothesis comes with the messy, contingent detail of lived experience; the more detailed the context of a question up for discussion (such as the legal cases of judicial rhetoric) the 'thicker' its hypothesis and the greater the uncertainty both of its resolution and even, perhaps, of the very question itself. This uncertainty is matched by a greater investment of the self as the accretion of circumstantial detail renders hypothetical problems and scenarios increasingly emotive, making any purely intellectual deduction and argumentation less and less viable.

In contrast to dialectic, rhetoric is a means of persuasion that will employ any possible strategy, including deductive proof, to move its audience, playing on emotions every bit as much as on reason. In an Aristotelian psychological

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[19] See Julia Bourke's essay in this volume.

[20] Boethius, *De topicis differentiis*, 4 (trans. in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, pp. 193–94): 'The dialectical discipline examines the thesis only; a thesis is a question not involved in circumstances. The rhetorical [discipline], on the other hand, investigates and discusses hypotheses, that is, questions hedged in by a multitude of circumstances. Circumstances are who, what, where, when, why, how, by what means. [...] But if rhetoric takes up a thesis, it draws it into the hypothesis.' For the Latin text of the *De topicis*, see *Patrologia latina*, LXIV, cols 1173–1216. Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, III. 5. 5–18, and, for a discussion of the pertinence of the rhetorical hypothesis to fiction, see Trimpi, *Muses of One Mind*, pp. 25–34.

framework, choices are made by the will (*voluntas*), which is defined either as the appetitive intellect or the intellective appetite ('intellectus appetitivus vel appetitus intellectivus'),[21] and in his commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Giles of Rome says that rhetoric's persuasion does not happen without an act of the intellect that is moved by the will ('nunquam fiat talis persuasio, nisi actus intellectus a voluntate sit motus').[22] The hypothetical situation ('imagine that...'; 'what if...?') shares some of rhetoric's concern for the will, for appetites and passions, for the sensory and the aesthetic, even if in some cases it is only to the faintest degree. Like rhetoric more generally, this situation responds to the contingencies of lived, embodied experience with a reasoning that is not fully certain.

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the idea of the hypothetical situation and its demands in order to consider it in relation to poetry as well as rhetoric. When discussing the specific kind of knowing that poetry can produce, Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay, distinguishing verse composition from prose, discuss the former's 'situatedness'.[23] They are referring to the physical properties of verse composition, such as rhyme and rhythm, that engender a particularly embodied response to verbal art. In thinking about the scenarios of poetic invention, it seems useful to extend the concept of situatedness to include not only the sensory demands of literary style on the body but also the imaginative circumstances of the hypothetic situation into which the phantasmatic yet insistent presence of the imagined self is conjured. Just as a poem is heard or read in a body responsive to the physical qualities of poetic language, so any intellectual response to poetry depends on the situated self's response to poetry's imaginary scenarios (and, as Aristotle says, the soul never thinks without an image).[24] The realm of the hypothetical serves, then, as a poetic space in which thought is not separable from experience, although it is only possible to make such a claim by making the terms 'poetry' and 'experience' both broader and more precise, understood in particularly medieval ways.

Not all the essays in this collection consider poetry in the strict sense, but consideration of medieval understandings of what 'poetry' is will elucidate its relationship to the imagination and to the thinking that comes with the more

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[21] Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, VI. 2, 1139b, ed. by Gauthier, pp. 479–80.

[22] Giles of Rome, *Rhetorica*, fol. 1ᵛ. An English translation of sections of Giles's commentary can be found in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, pp. 792–811.

[23] Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, p. 199.

[24] Aristotle, *On the Soul*, III. 7, 431a; *On Memory*, 1, 450a.

modern idea of 'fiction', with which medieval *poetria* has considerable overlap. While Armstrong and Kay consider the specifics of poetic production in verse as opposed to that in prose, the particular concern in this volume is the understanding of poetry as the shaping of fictions, an idea often repeated in commentaries on Horace's *Ars Poetica*, the seminal text of medieval poetic theory.[25] The work of poetry, according to this model, is properly understood to be the production of figures of speech and/or the less truthful discussion of events adapted with the special licence that is accorded to poets to generate imaginative scenarios that ideally are both pleasing and useful.[26] While it is not the only medieval account of poetry,[27] this understanding sees it as a kind of fictionality, a textual or pragmatic phenomenon that is not restricted to poetic works but can be found in differing ways in works of mystical meditation, autobiography, or philosophical debate.

There is significant overlap between rhetoric and poetics, as is demonstrated most clearly in the extent to which Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars versificatoria* and Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* combine doctrine from the *Ars Poetica* with rhetorical theory from Cicero's *De inventione* and pseudo-Cicero's *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.[28] There is a strain of medieval literary theory, then, that sees *poetria* as a kind of writing governed not so much by specific formal constraints as by a concern (shared in part by rhetoric) for generating artificial figures of speech and fictions with which to think. Nicolette Zeeman clearly articulates the particular ambiguities of this mode:

> As against the languages of natural science, philosophy, or ethics, poetry may be mediating rather than transparent, insinuating rather than defining, opining rather than knowing, descriptive rather than argumentative, exemplary rather than prescriptive, suggestive rather than categorical.[29]

We intend the 'poetry' of this collection's title to be taken in a particularly broad sense to refer to the fashioning (*poiesis*) of imagined, hypothetical situations, often using stylized language, in ways that aim to generate certain kinds

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[25] Gillespie, 'From the Twelfth Century to *c.* 1450', p. 164; Gillespie, 'Never Look a Gift Horace in the Mouth'; Zeeman, 'The Schools Give License to Poets', p. 153.

[26] Horace, *Ars Poetica*, vv. 333–34.

[27] For discussion of the range of meanings given to 'poetry' in the Middle Ages, see Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, pp. 145–54; Olson, 'Making and Poetry in the Age of Chaucer'.

[28] *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, pp. 558–59, 595–96.

[29] Zeeman, 'The Schools Give a License to Poets', pp. 155–56.

of experiences not generally available in an extra-textual existence. This might involve a dialogue with a pagan philosopher (an encounter probably impossible in twelfth-century France)[30] or the narration of an ascent of Mont Ventoux in the Alps, as narrated and at least partially fictionalized by Petrarch.[31] Stretching the idea of poetry in this way is not to abolish category distinctions between different kinds of texts studied by historians of literature, philosophy, or theology, but to offer a tool with which to identify and compare analogous textual practices in works often kept separate by disciplinary boundaries (medieval and modern).[32] It has been observed that the category of the thought experiment will lose its usefulness if it is taken to be simply identical to 'the fictional'.[33] Nevertheless, as a way of thinking across disciplinary boundaries, the notion of the thought experiment gains its heuristic value for analysing the particular area in which the imaginative techniques of texts usually understood to be 'philosophical' or 'theological' begin to overlap with the techniques of the poetic. No one would argue that the mystical meditation in Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* is the same kind of text as William Langland's *Piers Plowman*.[34] However, considering each text's hypothetical scenarios as poetically crafted and as spaces for thought experimentation can reveal certain similarities in how different texts seek to generate knowledge through an affective, literary art.

In considering how knowledge might come from experience, especially the synthetic or hypothetical experience of imaginative scenarios, we must be attentive to the meanings of 'experience'. The medieval English use of the word suggests that it is understood primarily as empirical, signifying the impressions that come from the senses, rather than the judgements that arise from them.[35] To have undergone an experience in this sense does not necessarily imply that

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[30] See Marenbon's chapter in this volume.

[31] See Francesca Southerden's chapter in this volume.

[32] This collection arises, in fact, from an interdisciplinary conference held at New College, Oxford in April 2015, whose explicit aim was to bring together scholars working across the spectrum of medieval languages and academic disciplines to think about speculation in relation to this broad sense of the poetic.

[33] Roux, 'Introduction', p. 24. Roux therefore adduces a particular characteristic to thought experiments, that they 'are designed for framing a specific, preconceived thought goal, or that they have a well-determined cognitive intention'. As should be apparent, the texts discussed in *Medieval Thought Experiments* certainly do not all share this characteristic and would not be classed as 'thought experiments' according to the more common use of the term.

[34] Discussed in Gustav Zamore's and Mishtooni Bose's chapters in this volume, respectively.

[35] See Bose's chapter in this volume.

learning has taken place or that one has arrived at greater knowledge, and an imaginative experience that is too vivid may be inimical to thought rather than productive of it. Poetry, then, always runs the risk of generating pleasurable imaginative experiences that cannot be put into any kind of useful philosophical or theological service. The Latin *experientia* can also mean a test, that is, an experiment, or the undergoing or witnessing of certain phenomena.[36] In the most general sense, 'experiments are anything which has been experienced', so that Roger Bacon's famous concept *scientia experimentalis* can best be translated as the 'science of experience' rather than as experimental science.[37] In the imagined scenarios generated by thought experiments, propositions, principles, or ideas can be tested or explored without an author committing to them. Of course, experiments do not always produce the sought-for result, and it is striking how often medieval dream poetry produces narratives that are inconclusive or that collapse into either paradox or incomprehension. We might think of the strange endings of Alain de Lille's *Complaint of Nature* or the Middle English dream-vision *Pearl*, but perhaps the most instructive example of deliberate inconclusion is the final part of Nicole Oresme's fourteenth-century *Treatise on the Commensurability or Incommensurability of the Celestial Motions*. After two sections discussing propositions about the movements of heavenly bodies, the third consists of a dream in which the god Apollo appears to the narrator but refuses to adjudicate between the personifications of Arithmetic and Geometry who debate over whether or not celestial motions are commensurable. At this point the dreamer awakes and the text ends, leaving the problem ultimately unresolved.[38]

The use of imaginative frames in which to carry out tests or generate cognitive experiences is the particular concern of *Medieval Thought Experiments*, and as Vincent Gillespie's closing essay shows, the arrival of Arabic commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* in the High Middle Ages made available an understanding of poetic persuasion as dependent on poetry's ability to provoke images in the minds of its audiences. By provoking scenes not witnessed in real life, poetry allows for certain kind of experiences that can be imaginatively empirical, so to speak, allowing for a hypothetical mode of proceeding to supplement more

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[36] King, 'Mediaeval Thought-Experiments', pp. 47–49.

[37] Easton, *Roger Bacon and his Search for a Universal Science*, p. 7.

[38] Nicole Oresme and the Kinematics of *Circular Motion*, ed. and trans. by Grant, pp. 322–23. I am grateful for discussions on this passage with Aled Roberts. As a point of comparison, Peter Abelard situates his *Collationes* within the framework of a dream-vision. See Marenbon in this volume, p. 26.

orthodox methods used in the Arts or Theology Faculties of medieval universities according to which truths or judgements are derived through logic and from authority. The leaps of the imagination may not simply be tools of persuasion but may make it possible to sidestep logical or material restrictions to enable a different kind of thinking that is hypothetical, speculative, and experimental.

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This book's first chapter, by John Marenbon, considers the nature of thought experiments themselves, opening up questions of whether and how it can make sense to compare 'strict-sense' philosophical thought experiments with a looser sense of the term as referring to literary works. The particular focus is the question of unbelief, how thinkers in the High and late Middle Ages might have used 'loose-sense' thought experiments to imagine positions put forward by pagans, for example, informed by philosophy and reason but without access to the revealed truths of Christian doctrine. Marenbon concludes his chapter by rejecting the usefulness of the category of 'thought experiment' for such practices, although his heuristic use of the term — initially writing as if he believed in its value — demonstrates how it is possible to start from a hypothetical a priori position in order to see what conclusions might arise from it. This may even suggest his chapter itself as a kind of loose-sense thought experiment, in which journey and destination do not map onto each other in a simple way.

The tension between journey and destination features in Marco Nievergelt's consideration of Guillaume de Deguileville's fourteenth-century French allegory *Le Pèlerinage de vie humaine* (*The Pilgrimage of Human Life*), which he reads not just as a didactic poem but as one which 'aims to illuminate the mechanisms of human cognition itself'. Deguileville repurposes Avicenna's famous 'Flying Man' thought experiment, in which the soul is imagined suspended without any sensory data, whose main purpose was to show the soul to be a separate substance to the body. In the *Pèlerinage*, the allegorical figure of Reason introduces the experiment only for it to backfire, showing it to be impossible for an embodied subject to envisage Avicenna's substance dualism. The radically innovative frame of Deguileville's allegory allows for particular kinds of theoretical uncertainty and suggests the problem posed to human thought by the complicating interference of the body's sense-impressions and the imagination's phantasms.

The question of the knowledge that comes from embodiment is at stake in Mishtooni Bose's discussion of William Langland's *Piers Plowman* and the meaning of the term 'experience', which occurs only once in the whole poem. In

a way that chimes with Nievergelt's elucidation of the potential of Deguileville's allegorical experiment, Bose sees the English poem 'as undertaking a de facto defamiliarization of academic Christology by freely constructing different frames of reference when conducting its own exploration of theological questions'. While Daniel Reeve's article (discussed below) considers the failure of figurative language in two twelfth-century texts, here Bose shows how Langland has his allegorical figures engage in productive debate about the implications of the tropes they use to discuss the nature of God. At stake is the kind of experiential knowledge available to the incarnated Christ, a human kind of cognition which serves as a model for other human embodied subjects, who come to learn only with the aid of time, patience, and reflection, and in this, *Piers Plowman*'s difficulty is mimetic of human epistemology more generally.

In Alice Lamy's account of the early fourteenth-century French dialogue *Placides e Timéo*, this little-studied text emerges as a complex, mystical encyclopaedia motivated by the cosmological concerns of medieval Neoplatonism while drawing repeatedly on principles from Aristotelian physics. More than a simple compendium of facts about light, the cosmos, and wonders, this work shows a concern with how divine light can be encountered, the uses of the marvellous, and the relationship between human language and divine truth. The dialogue, marked by curious digressions and an idiosyncratic movement between different spheres of knowledge, emphasizes the importance of imaginative speculation and the productive use of wonder for encountering and experiencing the truth of divine creation. Seeing the work as aimed at an aristocratic, non-Latinate audience, Lamy brings out the text's preoccupation with an affective process of learning that combines the spiritual with the physical world.

The strange architecture and the mysterious dream-world of Chaucer's *House of Fame* seems to promise access to mystical truths as the narrator 'Geffrey' is carried off into a spiritual realm in the talons of an eagle. Jane Griffiths interprets his journey through the Palace of Fame and the House of Rumour as an extended meditation on the experience of thought, especially the kind of thought that comes from the subject's engagement with poetic invention. Even while drawing on the mnemotechnics of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, The *House of Fame* repeatedly suggests the disruption and disjunction attendant on the attempts to think through poetry. Traces of the arts of memory 'serve less as a reliable means of recollecting material external to the poet than as a means of exploring the unreliable workings of the poet's own mind'. In this account, Chaucer represents the actual mental processes of literary invention as weirder and less orderly than the more artificial, formal schemes of invention found in rhetorical handbooks.

Investigation of the relationship between text, memory, and imagination continues in Julia Bourke's essay considering Cistercian devotional texts by Anselm of Canterbury, Aelred of Rivaulx, and Stephen of Sawley. These are understood as 'emotional experiments', scripts for the performance of feeling aimed at generating imaginative scenes and, through them, affective meditational experiences. The first meditation of Anselm's *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem* and the final meditation of Aelred's *De institutione inclusarum* both seek to make the reading addressee imagine and thus, in a certain sense, experience what it will be like to undergo the Final Judgement. Coupled with injunctions to produce groans and trembling at these hypothetical scenes, these texts produce a bodily and emotional disruption that might lead to spiritual development. Bourke connects these meditations through their formulaic structure to a series of Cistercian meditation guides drawn on figures of hands, one each on the fear and the love of God. The physical body and the imagination pose challenges, as they would for the later Cistercian, Deguileville. Here, however, they are less obstacles to cognition than tools of memory, forming a site of reflection in the service of salvation and spiritual awakening.

Gustav Zamore considers mysticism and ethical formation in the context of the thirteenth-century Franciscan Bonaventure's evolving use of the term *synderesis*. It is most generally understood in a moral-psychological sense as the spark of conscience present in humans that allows them to discern right from wrong, but monastic theologian Thomas Gallus gives the term a more mystical sense as the apex of the mind that allows a person to achieve unity with God. Drawing partly from Gallus, Bonaventure writes his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (*The Mind's Journey to God*) which suggests itself as a text for meditation, through which *synderesis* can be understood and experienced as the attraction of the soul towards good and as participation with God. Zamore shows how Bonaventure, in the final part of the work, drawing on pseudo-Dionysian theology, switches from the more transparent language of scholastic enquiry to a mystical obscurity that suggests the self's dissolution. The *Itinerarium*'s particular focus is on the body of St Francis whose stigmata represent a union with the divine suffering body of Christ, effected through the working of *synderesis* so that 'mind and body are assimilated to the primary manifestation of the highest good — Christ crucified'.

In her consideration of Petrarch's narrative of his 'Ascent of Mont Ventoux' and canzone 129 of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, Francesca Southerden examines a more secular and less optimistic model for losing oneself, suggesting the potential but also the danger of non-teleological thought experiments. Using the notion of 'errancy [...] where to err is to wander but also to stray into

error', she shows how Petrarch's literary self becomes repeatedly sidetracked and distracted as his rambling leads him to unexpected moments of (self-)discovery and of confusion. Both the 'Ascent' and canzone 129 put into play 'a thinking, feeling, and desiring subject, which, however far it wanders, still encounters itself'. The failure to ascend correctly and the absence of any moment of clarity that might justify his climb indicate 'resistance of the Petrarchan "I" to principles of coherence' and offer an analogy to Deguileville's 'Flying Man' thought experiment, which fails thanks to the self's insistent corporeality. Thus, read against the Augustinian tradition of spiritual progress figured as physical ascent, Petrarch's rambling narrative of vain and potentially unproductive Alpinism becomes a site for thinking about the desire for distraction and for experiencing the perverse appeal of getting lost.

Jean de Meun's introduction to his French translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy* draws on the prologue to William of Aragon's commentary to see human nature as split between a desire for physical and for intellectual goods. Philip Knox contrasts this idea of a split human nature as expressed philosophically to examine how Jean's part of the *Romance of the Rose* can be a different kind of response to Boethius's philosophy of natural desire. In the *Rose* Jean experiments by pushing the *Consolation*'s suggestion of the naturalness and necessity of sexual reproduction as far as it can go according to its own internal logic. The poem's hypothetical dream-framework allows a kind of split discourse unencumbered by obligations to coherence or authenticity so that figures such as Nature and the Old Woman ('La Vieille') can push a doctrine of a purely natural drive to the point of absurdity in a manner whose influence can be seen in Deguileville, Chaucer, and Langland.[39] Rather than a demolition of Boethius's theory of a natural drive, Jean's poetic reworking represents a ludic meditation on the limits of desire and its relationship to the natural pursuit of sensible goods.

Gabrielle Lyons takes the linguistic and hermeneutic games of Old French fabliaux seriously, reading them against theologians' biblical exegesis. Interpretation of sacred doctrine was potentially without end (which is not to permit any interpretation), and, following Augustine, the most influential test of an interpretation was whether it accorded with the principle of charity. The fabliaux are short poems, often scandalous in content and sardonic in style, that present a world in which venality is omnipresent and charity hard to come by. One characteristic of these narratives is the particular attention they play to

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[39] See the respective essays in this volume by Marco Nievergelt, Jane Griffiths, and Bose.

signification, its tricks, and its pitfalls. In the absence of charity, characters are free to engage in semiotic deceit, exemplified in the story of Frère Denise (Friar Denise) whose disguises as a Franciscan and then as a virginal bride dramatize a disconcerting detachment between signifying clothing and signified person, encapsulated by a punning play on the concept of *habitus* (habit). In their immorality, characters in fabliaux repeatedly gloss themselves and each other, falling into error through errors of interpretation. Their caricatured venality in hypothetical scenarios in which cleverness trumps charity opens up a space for hermeneutic play that can suggest the dangers of uncharitable exegesis.

The refusal of meaning features in Hue of Rotelande's deliberately overlong Anglo-Norman romance *Ipomedon* as a means of generating inquisition about the nature of romance narrative through what Daniel Reeve calls 'non-functional topoi', that is, 'patterns which conventionally gesture towards a certain meaning, but which fail to do so in the context in which they are employed'. This failure to mean is a kind of textual sterility that allows the romance to be a testing ground for philosophical questions, one that subverts rather than suggests any ideas of poetry's instrumental use for resolving ethical dilemmas. *Ipomedon*'s epilogue draws on the curious reworking of Alan of Lille's *Complaint of Nature*, and Reeve offers a reading of the *Complaint* as 'a text stuck in a hermeneutic circle' so that artistic discourse always frustrates the self's attempt to exceed its own bounds. This sense of art's ability to signify in the absence of extra-textual referents is shared by both Alan and Hue and it may not be going too far too see *Ipomedon* as a kind of thought experiment for thinking about the futility of thought experiments.

The sense that poetry's art conjures up discursive spaces for testing theological and philosophical questions recurs repeatedly, not just in Reeve's chapter but throughout the collection, and the question of how such thinking was theorized in the Middle Ages is the subject of this collection's final essay. Vincent Gillespie's re-evaluation of medieval poetic theory examines the scholastic reception of Aristotle's *Poetics* as mediated by the Arabic commentary tradition to consider what kind of thinking occurs in the reception of poetry. This piece re-evaluates the dominant account of medieval poetics according to which the poetic was seen as necessarily ethical.[40] Instead, it highlights an important strain of thought according to which poetry's fictions produce an imaginative assent, which is quite different from ethical assent or the workings of rhetorical persuasion. Gillespie shows that such assent 'is ultimately self-ref-

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[40] See, especially, Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages*.

erential and lacking any explicit or implicit ethical agenda' so that 'imagination rather than morality is the end of poetry'. Nevertheless, in Hermann's translation of Averroes on poetry, the German suggests the cognitive and ethical potential of poetry, which can produce an 'imaginative and metaphorical landscape', opening a mental space for testing hypotheses, against which audiences can measure their own experience of life. Poetry requires interpretation; the imaginative situations it conjures up do not offer firm conclusions but, rather, become the starting point for continued enquiry. In the medieval theory that grew from reading the Averroistic *Poetics*, then, it is the very thickness and vividness of thought experiments that are the spur for a thinking that depends on the visions and fantasies of the imagination.

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# Thought Experiments with Unbelief in the Long Middle Ages

## John Marenbon

'Thought experiment' is a term of *philosophical* art. The term itself, adopted occasionally by philosopher-scientists since the nineteenth century, has come into common use only in contemporary analytic philosophy. But the type of argumentative strategy it describes, so it is usually held, has been used since Socrates, and medieval philosophers are thought to have been particularly fond of it. As a specialist in philosophy among writers with mainly literary interests, the simplest course for me would have been to restrict my discussion to passages in medieval texts of this sort, which are usually thought to fit contemporary philosophers' notion of a thought experiment. My comments on thought experiments in this stricter sense would thus provide a background to the much looser way in which most contributors, at the editors' invitation, have taken the term, as embracing any texts which use fictional as imaginative spaces where 'propositions, principles, or ideas can be tested or explored without an author committing to them'.[1]

I have, however, chosen a more dangerous strategy. Even among philosophers, there is no consensus as to what does or does not count as a thought experiment. Some want to draw a very sharp distinction between thought experiments in their subject or natural science and the world of literature. But others would go so far as to say that fiction generates knowledge by the

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[1] See Jonathan Morton's introduction to this volume, p. 12.

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mechanism of thought experiments, or even that literature in general is a sort of thought experiment. They thus acknowledge that, as well as the strict-sense thought experiments found in philosophical texts, there are thought experiments in a looser sense, which might be found in many sorts of writing.

It is open to question whether this more liberal attitude to thought experiments is justifiable, and there are problems even about strict-sense thought experiments — how they, and this label, should be used. There are problems, too, about the distinction, used in describing this attitude, between philosophical texts and literary ones: neither category applies very neatly to medieval writings. But I shall put such doubts aside for the moment. After briefly explaining and illustrating what are thought experiments in the strict sense, as used by philosophers, I shall characterize, as suggested above, a looser type of thought experiment, though this notion is still rather more restrictive than the open-ended approach suggested by the editors of this volume. For reasons I shall explain, a theme particularly congenial to such loose-type thought experiments in the Middle Ages is that of unbelief, and the larger part of this chapter will study principally a number of such experiments, among them writings by the twelfth-century philosopher Peter Abelard, a text connected with the late thirteenth-century Paris arts masters, and works by sixteenth-century near contemporaries Pietro Pomponazzi and Thomas More. At the end, I shall draw a, perhaps surprising, conclusion.

## Strict-Sense and Loose-Sense Thought Experiments

Here are two straightforward examples of philosophical thought experiments, thought experiments in the strict sense. One comes from late twentieth-century analytic philosophy, the other from the Middle Ages. In his famous twin earth experiment, Hilary Putnam asks us to imagine twin earth, an atom-for-atom replica of our earth in every respect except that the water-like substance there, though perceptually and in every practical way indistinguishable from water, is not in fact $H_2O$, but XYZ. We also must imagine ourselves back in a time before the chemical structure of water was known. Putnam argues that my double on twin earth can never succeed in referring to water, even though his perceptions and thoughts are exactly the same as mine. Putnam's point is to show that reference is determined externally, not by mental contents.[2]

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[2] Putnam first put forward this thought experiment in 'Meaning and Reference'.

Almost nine hundred years earlier, Anselm made the following thought experiment. Suppose God were to create an angel, not all at once, but in stages. At first, the angel would have no will, and so could not will anything. Then God gives it a will for happiness. If, at this stage, the angel wills for what it believes will make it happy, it cannot in any way be blamed for doing so, because it cannot do otherwise. Anselm's point is that it is only once a second will, a will for the right, has been given to it that the angel will be culpable if it does wrong in pursuit of its happiness.[3]

Both these cases illustrate the main characteristics of strict-sense thought experiments. They aim to establish a particular conclusion within an argument. They are not, however, themselves presented as arguments, either deductive or inductive. Nor do they bring to bear new facts about the world. Rather, they attempt to make evident the point by our working through a purely imagined scenario — and, indeed, very often, as here, an extravagantly counterfactual one. Thought experiments are like philosophical examples in that they set out something concrete, if frequently far-fetched, but they are intended not merely to illustrate a truth, but to establish one. In this respect, they resemble real experiments in a laboratory: they are carefully designed to confirm a hypothesis. And, for this reason, they are deliberately thin in the way they describe their scenario. The thought experimenter gives just the details needed to establish the point; there is no play of the imagination to add details or strengthen the fiction.

When a thought experiment concerns a problem closer to immediate concerns than the questions of semantics and moral psychology at issue for Putnam and Anselm, must it lose the features that characterize the strict sense of the term? Consider one of the most famous thought experiments in contemporary medical ethics, Judith Jarvis Thomson's unconscious violinist, who can be saved from a fatal disease only if you (and you alone — no one else has the right type of blood) remain connected up with him for nine months. In her view, you are clearly under no obligation to give up your liberty to save him, and so — this is the aim of her thought experiment — by analogy, a woman is under no obligation to let her unborn baby remain attached to her.[4] Although a lover of literature is much more likely to respond to this scenario, which could be the plot for a science-fiction novella, than to Putnam's and Anselm's rarefied abstractions, it will be clear that the basic features are still those of a strict-sense thought

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[3] Anselm, *De casu diaboli*, 12–14, ed. by Schmitt, pp. 252–59.

[4] Thomson, 'A Defense of Abortion', pp. 48–49.

experiment. We are presented with an incredible situation, engineered solely to bring out the point in question, and thinly described, with just a little rhetorical colouring (the detail that the sufferer is a violinist) to draw in the reader.[5]

There are, then, apparently strict-sense thought experiments even in the more down-to-earth branches of philosophy, such as ethics, and indeed in natural science and perhaps other subjects (history, economics, theology) too. But might there not also be a place for loose-sense thought experiments? Loose-sense thought experiments involve the same process of using an imagined situation to establish argumentative points (otherwise they would not be thought experiments at all), but describe the imagined situation more thickly, entering into the fiction more fully and being open to reaching a range of conclusions, rather than intent on establishing just one.

One subject about which medieval Christian authors engaged in such loose-sense thought experiments is unbelief. In order to show why, it is best to begin with a kind of counterexample, a strict-sense thought experiment by a medieval author about belief. The third of Boethius's short theological treatises (*opuscula sacra*) is devoted to showing how all things are good in virtue of existing, without thereby being essentially good, a claim which is needed in order to uphold the Platonic view that evil does not exist and yet maintain that God alone is good by his essence. In order to do so, he asks us to make this experiment:

> Let us therefore remove the existence (*praesentia*) of the First Good from our minds for a while — though indeed it can be known that it exists from the views of the learned and the unlearned, and from the religions of barbarous peoples. Having, therefore, removed it for a while, let us posit that all things which exist are good and consider in what they are able to be good, if they did not in any way derive from the First Good.[6]

Boethius goes on to show how, under this counterfactual assumption, it becomes clear that things exist for one reason and are good for another reason, just as a round thing is round for one reason and heavy for another reason. Therefore, they are not essentially good. The thought experiment supposing

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[5] That is not to say that this rhetorical colouring is innocent. Thomson deliberately chooses a type of person who is likely to be esteemed by her academic readers (as opposed, say, to a murderer or a banker) to bring out the point that even the enormous gain to the world of keeping a Heifetz alive does not — so she wants to urge — put the unfortunate woman under an obligation to remain attached to him. But as soon as some circumstantial detail is added, it can be asked why there should not be more, or how changing what is given might affect the argument.

[6] Boethius, *Opuscula theologica*, ed. by Moreschini, p. 190, ll. 82–89.

that God does not exist is needed to clarify the distinction, because, as things really are, thanks to God everything both exists and participates in goodness and so, extensionally speaking, all things are good in virtue of existing, and so it is hard to see how they are not essentially good.

This thought experiment very clearly involves unbelief — unbelief of the most basic kind, that there is no God. The situation is thinly described, just so as to let Boethius establish his conclusion. Indeed, it is hard to see how Boethius would be able to enter into the supposition that God does not exist in any thicker way, since he is clear that everyone, learned and unlearned, accepts his existence. The loose-sense medieval thought experiments with unbelief, by contrast, almost never begin from the hypothesis, alien not just to the immediate experience and intellectual world but also to the wider reading of medieval writers, that there is no God.[7] They begin, rather, from the supposition that God is not the God of Christian doctrine. In particular, many of them suppose, rather, a God and a universe not their own, but deeply familiar to educated medieval writers: the deity and the world of pagan Antiquity, as presented by its philosophers, who were usually considered to have been monotheists.[8] It was this vicarious familiarity which made a thick type of supposing possible and so enabled them to engage in loose-sense thought experiments on this theme.

## Abelard's Jew and Philosopher

Abelard's *Collationes*, written probably *c.* 1130, has as its central character a figure who represents exactly this sort of disbelief, an ancient philosopher *redivivus*. The Philosopher figures in both of the dialogues that make up the work. In the second, he debates with a Christian, but in the first his interlocutor is another type of unbeliever (from the Christian perspective), a Jew. Normally Jewish unbelief in medieval Christian dialogues, where they defend their views, did not require any sort of thought experiment. Jews lived among Christians,

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[7] The 'almost' is made necessary because of the beginning of the *Dialogue of the Three Wise Men and the Gentile* by Ramon Llull, which confronts its readers with a gentile 'who had no knowledge of God, nor did he believe in the Resurrection, nor did he think anything existed after death'. Llull imagines himself into the gentile's position to the extent of depicting him as wretched: inconsolably sad and in tears. See Llull, *Llibre del gentil e dels tres savis*, ed. by Bonner, pp. 6–7; trans. in Llull, 'The Book of the Gentile', ed. and trans. by Bonner, p. 111. But he then allows the gentile to be convinced very speedily by argument that there is a God; see Marenbon, 'Imaginary Pagans', pp. 156–58.

[8] For this type of disbelief, see Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*.

although in separate communities. Real debates between Jews and Christians sometimes took place, and the Christian writers could record them more or less faithfully, or invent their own on the same general lines.[9] The debate with the Jew in the *Collationes* is, however, completely untypical of the Jewish–Christian debate genre, which usually have a Christian debating with a Jew and often convincing him of the superiority of Christianity,[10] and it can be considered, like the second dialogue, as a loose-sense thought experiment. For a start, it is not a debate between a Jew and a Christian, but between a Jew and the imaginary figure of a philosopher. To emphasize the unreality of both this discussion and that which follows, Abelard presents the whole work within the frame of a dream vision ('Aspiciebam in uisu noctis...'; I saw in the night a vision ...).[11] And, so it turns out, the Jew is most unlike any Jew whom Abelard might really have encountered when he was in Paris.

At first indeed, it seems that, on the contrary, Abelard wishes to be highly realistic in his portrayal of this character. The Jew introduces himself by giving a detailed account of the difficult, precarious life he and his coreligionists lead in the Europe of Abelard's time, forced to buy the Christian rulers' protection, yet knowing that these very rulers will dispossess, expel, or kill them as soon as it is convenient, and obliged to follow the strict dietary laws of the Old Testament, which forbid most easily available delicacies, and to undergo circumcision.[12] This passage, unlike anything else written by a medieval Christian author, shows an extraordinary capacity for imaginative empathy, but it is not of course a thought experiment, since it is an account of how things really were. In what the Jew is made to argue in the debate that follows, however, Abelard does not at all attempt to present the ideas or arguments a real Jew of his time might have put forward. Rather, he constructs an entirely artificial figure: a thinker who shares Abelard's own central ideas about the importance of intention in moral judgement, and of love for God and all fellow humans, who seeks bliss in heaven rather than earthly prosperity, but who accepts the Old

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[9] See the articles collected in Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in Dispute*.

[10] On the generic background to the *Collationes*, and the relationship between Abelard's work and the well-established genre of Jewish–Christian debate, see Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. by Marenbon and Orlandi, pp. xxxvii–xl.

[11] Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. by Marenbon and Orlandi, Pref. 1 (p. 2).

[12] Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. by Marenbon and Orlandi, i. 15–17 (pp. 18–20). On Abelard's knowledge of Jews and Jewish biblical scholarship, see Mews and Perry, 'Peter Abelard, Heloise and Jewish Biblical Exegesis'.

Testament alone, and not the New Testament.[13] The dialogue is a loose-sense thought experiment, designed to show whether such a person gains anything at all by following the written law of the Old Testament and would not do better, as the Philosopher argues, simply to follow natural law, accessible to him by reason. The result of the experiment is clear by the end of this first dialogue. The Philosopher wins the argument: the Jew is not helped by the Old Law, and he would lead as good a life, and an easier one, if he followed natural law alone.

Most commentators regard this portrayal as showing a certain hostility by Abelard towards Judaism, which is presented — they say — as further from Christian truth than purely natural reasoning.[14] This judgement misses the point. Abelard was not trying to construct the arguments a real Jew might give. Rather, he was trying to test out, in general, though using the Old Testament as an example, whether obedience to external, written laws can be justified and can form a satisfactory basis for a good moral life — and coming to a negative conclusion. The point he wants to make applies, not to Jews — who would not, of course, have been readers of Abelard's work — but to Christians. Abelard does not use the New Testament for his experiment, not just because that would have been too daring even for him, but also because the New Testament is supposed to give an internal, spiritual law. Even so, this dialogue has large and unsettling implications for the rule-based Christianity which many of Abelard's contemporaries preached and followed.[15]

The figure of the Philosopher has even less basis in the real world of Abelard's time than that of the Jew. Elements in his description may be linked to the vague idea Abelard could have had of philosophers in Islamic Spain, but in the main the Philosopher is a figure brought back to life from the ancient, pre-Christian classical world.[16] He is not, however, just any old ancient philosopher, but, as Abelard's presentation points out very precisely, one of what

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[13] See Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. by Marenbon and Orlandi, pp. xlvi–l; Von Moos, 'Die *Collationes* Abaelards und die Lage der Juden im 12. Jahrhundert', pp. 350–51 (this article expands the earlier Von Moos, 'Les Collationes d'Abélard et la "question juive" au XIIᵉ siècle').

[14] See Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. by Marenbon and Orlandi, p. xlvi n. 98 for details.

[15] See, for instance, the penitentials discussed in Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, and cf. Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. by Marenbon and Orlandi, p. 73 n. 167.

[16] See Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. by Marenbon and Orlandi, pp. l–liv; Von Moos, 'Die *Collationes* Abaelards und die Lage der Juden im 12. Jahrhundert', pp. 336–37 and n. 37 for a full bibliography of the discussion about the Philosopher's origins. For a more detailed discussion about the Philosopher as constructed by Abelard, see Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, pp. 81–85.

might seem to us a strange variety indeed, an Epicurean Stoic, that is to say, he explicitly follows Epicurus and his view that pleasure is the only good, but in such a way that he can also hold, with the Stoics, that virtue is sufficient for happiness. To understand why he is depicted in this way, we need to consider both Abelard's views about the ancient philosophers and the aim of the experiment which he conducts in the second dialogue of the *Collationes*, between the Philosopher and the Christian. By the time he wrote the *Collationes*, Abelard had already written his extended eulogy of the ancient world, and especially its philosophers, in Book II of the *Theologia christiana*.[17] The outstanding ancient philosophers, he explains there, were Plato and his followers, who, he thinks, succeeded in grasping not just the existence of God but also his triune nature, and perhaps in some cases they knew even more, long before the coming of Christ, about specifically Christian doctrine. But their success, he adds, was not due to their using reason alone. On the one hand, prophecies, such as those of the sibyls, opened some of Christian doctrine to everyone in the ancient world. On the other hand, the ascetic, morally upright life of the philosophers made them worthy of a special revelation from God.[18]

Abelard is careful not to make his Philosopher into a Platonist, the best sort of ancient philosopher, because he wants him to be an example of a thinker who is guided solely by reason, without any benefit of revelation. Abelard's thought experiment is to see how far such a second-best ancient philosopher, cut off from revelation, can go towards finding the truth about what is the highest good. After a long discussion, his conclusion is, as the Christian summarizes it, 'that we are to understand the highest good as the quietness of life in heaven, just as by contrast the greatest evil as the future damnation of the wicked'.[19]

This view, which is in fact based on the Epicurean side of the Philosopher (Epicurean tranquillity being identified with the quietness of heaven), is held to be identical to the Stoic idea that 'virtue is enough for happiness; and since the virtues alone make a person happy, no one gains this name by any other path'.[20] The position is satisfactory enough for the Christian to defer to the Philosopher for a presentation of the virtues, but in the end it turns out to be quite far from

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[17] There is a reference to the *Theologia christiana* in Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. by Marenbon and Orlandi, II. 78 (p. 98); cf. p. xxviii.

[18] For a detailed discussion, see Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, pp. 74–81.

[19] Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. by Marenbon and Orlandi, II. 109 (pp. 126–28).

[20] Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. by Marenbon and Orlandi, II. 109 (p. 128). For Abelard's rehabilitation of Epicureanism, see Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. by Marenbon and Orlandi, pp. lxix–lxxi.

the truth as the Christian sees it, that the highest good for humans lies simply in loving God. But what is most important about the *Collationes* for the present discussion is not this conclusion, but the way Abelard reaches it. It is rare that a philosophical dialogue acts as a thought experiment. Often, as in most Socratic or medieval teacher-and-pupil dialogues, the form is merely a more readable way of setting out an argument.[21] Or, as in the Ciceronian form imitated by Hume and others, the speakers are representatives of given philosophical positions. In the *Collationes*, however, both the figure of the Jew and that of the Philosopher are given artificially constructed points of departure, which allow Abelard to search experimentally for an answer to his questions about the adequacy of outward law, and the rational graspability of the highest good. That is why the work is a genuine thought experiment, but in the loose sense: the experimenting involves the author's working out from the inside what the intellectual worlds of a Jew educated in Abelardian ethics and a philosopher totally cut off from revelation are like. Even the Christian, perhaps, is an experimental figure too — a sincere believer unconstrained by accepted Church doctrine in his search for a coherent, rationally acceptable and morally acceptable account of his religion.

## Arts Masters and Thought Experiments about Not Being Christian

A little over a century after Abelard wrote his *Collationes*, the two largest educational institutions in Europe, the Arts Faculties of Paris and Oxford universities, had been firmly established as places dedicated to exactly the type of thinking with which he had experimented through his figure of the Philosopher: thinking based on reasoning and empirical evidence (as represented in a supposedly ideal form by the texts of Aristotle), to the exclusion of revelation. The masters and students in these faculties were, of course, Christians, and they were expected to be attentive to their religious duties. But the ecclesiastical authorities, who were in charge of the universities, forbad them to discuss matters concerning revelation, which were the concern of a higher faculty, that of theology. Should we therefore consider the entire work of the Arts Faculties of

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[21] This is true in the didactic dialogues of Alcuin, in Eriugena's vast *Periphyseon*, and in Anselm's dialogues, even though, in the two latter examples, there is plenty of give-and-take, so that, especially in Anselm, reading the dialogues becomes a lesson in how to think philosophically.

the medieval universities, which multiplied throughout Europe after the mid-fourteenth century, as a sort of thought experiment with unbelief? Not really. In most of their work, arts masters were not required to set aside any beliefs, but merely to pursue subjects unconnected with revelation, or topics where their rational speculations reached conclusions compatible with or the same as those of their Christian faith. There were, though, areas on which some arts masters did indeed argue for conclusions which went against Christian belief — most notoriously, philosophers such as Siger of Brabant and John of Jandun, who argued that the correct interpretation of Aristotle's views about the soul, and also the most rationally convincing view, was that of Averroes, according to which there is only one immortal intellect, shared by all humanity, and so there is no individual immortality and so no post-mortem reward or punishment. Such thinkers would often develop these views at length, before declaring that, although they are the positions supported by reason, faith, which is true, holds otherwise and briefly outlining the orthodox doctrine. But even these discussions should not be counted as thought experiments with unbelief. There is, after all, no experimenting going on: the philosophers concerned are engaged — really, not just as an experiment: it is their job! — in explaining Aristotle's views (which they also believe to give the best rational account of the evidence), and they are simply stating the interpretation they find the most convincing, and then making their nod to the orthodoxy to which they may well have sincerely subscribed.

But there are two pieces of writing associated with the Arts Faculty and the deliberate restriction of its curriculum which can plausibly be seen, in part, as thought experiments. One of them may seem a surprising choice. It is none other than the famous Set of 219 Prohibited Articles issued in 1277 by Stephen Tempier, Bishop of Paris.[22] The Prohibitions include a whole set of aggressively anti-Christian positions, such as denial of the Trinity, the Resurrection, and transubstantiation, and the assertions that there is nothing wrong in pronouncing heresies, that theology is based on fables and that there are fables in Christian law as in that of other religions, that one should confess only for the sake of appearances, that one should not pray, that we have happiness in this life alone, that sex outside marriage is not a sin, and that abstinence from sex corrupts virtue and the species. As opposed to some of the other positions condemned, which can be traced to writings by arts masters of the time, there

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[22] The best edition of the articles (with French translation and commentary) is in Piché, *La Condamnation parisienne de 1277*.

is no record and no likelihood that anyone put forward any of these extreme positions. But Alain de Libera has suggested that, in a way, the censor, Tempier, understood the arts masters' underlying point of view better than they did themselves and that his prohibitions show the destination of the path they had only tentatively begun to tread.[23] In that case, Tempier has carried out a rather brilliant thought experiment, of the loose-sense variety, thinking himself into the radical arts masters' cast of mind and showing that, although they might not realize it, they are guilty of non-belief.

The other text was written by an arts master almost 250 years later: Pietro Pomponazzi's *De immortalitate animae*. It is a complexly structured work, which has been interpreted in many ways ever since it was first published in 1516. Pomponazzi begins by declaring that the true position about the immortality of the soul is Aquinas's, according to which our intellective soul is immortal without qualification, though mortal in a qualified way (in the sense that its way of functioning changes when we die). But, he adds, this position, though true, is neither — as Aquinas thought — Aristotle's, nor can it be established through reasoning. He goes on to launch a series of powerful arguments against Aquinas's view, against the Platonic dualist view which had been championed by Ficino, and against Averroes's theory of the one intellect for all humans. He then proposes and defends a variant of the view attributed by Alexander of Aphrodisias to Aristotle: that our soul is mortal without qualification, though immortal in a qualified way (only in the sense that it can grasp eternal, unchanging universals). But, at the end of the work, he declares that the problem of the immortality of the soul is a 'neutral' one — there are no demonstrative arguments to show either that it is immortal or that it is mortal — and so the most sensible course is to follow Christian teaching, which goes beyond human reason and assures us that our souls are immortal.

It is possible to read Pomponazzi's professions of agreement with Christian teaching as disingenuous or even ironical, and there were certainly many at the time who regarded *De immortalitate* as heretical.[24] But Pomponazzi vehe-

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[23] See De Libera, *Penser au moyen âge*, pp. 143–245, and De Libera, *Raison et foi*, pp. 174–230. There are many different views about the aims and nature of the condemnations. See Bianchi, *Censure et liberté intellectuelle à l'université de Paris*; Bianchi, 'New Perspectives on the Condemnation of 1277'; Bianchi, 'Students, Masters, and "Heterodox" Doctrines'; Aertsen and Speer, *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter?*, pp. 71–121, 371–434; Aertsen, Emery, and Speer, *Nach der Verurteilung von 1277*; Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, pp. 149–55.

[24] Martin Pine (*Pietro Pomponazzi*) is one of the recent proponents of this view, as is Burkhard Mojsisch, in his introduction to Pomponazzi, *Abhandlung*, ed. by Mojsisch, especially

mently denied that it was his intention to undermine Christian belief, and most specialists now accept that, looking at the *De immortalitate* in the context of Pomponazzi's work as a whole, there is no reason not to take it literally, as an argument that philosophy is incapable of showing whether or not the soul is immortal, but that we should unhesitatingly accept its immortality on the basis of faith.

None of what has been described in *De immortalitate* so far involves a thought experiment. But if the most usual reading of the whole work is correct, then there is one section which does. Near the end of the work, Pomponazzi puts forward a number of objections to the view that the soul is mortal based on the moral consequences of holding that position. The most powerful is based on the problem of theodicy. Many evils go unnoticed or unpunished in the world; many people go unrewarded for their goodness or suffer damage or death because of it. If the present life is the only one, then either God must lack the power to correct these injustices, and so he is not the ruler of the universe, or if he has the power and does not use it, he is wicked.[25] Linked to this objection is one about choosing to die for the sake of one's country or to avoid committing a terrible crime: Why would someone who thought the soul is mortal and that he or she faced annihilation ever make this brave choice?[26]

Since Pomponazzi does not in fact deny that there is life after death, he can answer this problem only by undertaking a thought experiment with unbelief, putting himself into the position of someone who cannot appeal to postmortem reward and punishment and finding how to reply to the objection. He denies that 'essentially' any evil is unpunished or good unrewarded, because the essential reward for virtue is virtue itself, which makes humans happy. Human nature 'can have nothing greater than virtue itself, because it alone makes man secure and removed from every perturbation'. Similarly, the punishment for vice is the vice itself, or rather, the guilt attached to it. Essential rewards and

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pp. 10–13. On the hostile reaction to *De immortalitate* in some quarters at the time, there is a vivid account by Pomponazzi himself at the beginning of his *Apologia*, ed. by Raimondi and Valverde, ɪ, Prologus (pp. 1110–12). As well as modern editions of the *De immortalitate* by Mojsisch and by Raimondi and Valverde, based on the first edition of 1516, there is an English translation in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. by Cassirer, Kristeller, and Randall, pp. 280–381.

[25] Pomponazzi, *De immortalitate animae*, ed. by Raimondi and Valverde, 13. 7 (p. 1046). On this problem and Pomponazzi's answer, see Marenbon, 'Pomponazzi's Ethics and the Philosophical Tradition'.

[26] Pomponazzi, *De immortalitate animae*, ed. by Raimondi and Valverde, 13. 6 (p. 1044).

punishments are thus inseparable from virtues and vices. There are indeed accidental, as opposed to essential, rewards and punishments, such as money or harm, and these are separable from virtues and vices, but they are far less perfect than the essential ones. It follows then, that '*because* they think that virtue alone is happiness, and vice is misery', those who deny the immortality of the soul 'leave aside all other goods except in so far as they lead to virtue and they reject from themselves everything which stands in the way of virtue'. That is to say, they are better placed to be virtuous than those who believe that human souls are immortal and will receive heavenly reward and punishment. Pomponazzi takes this position even further. He says that receiving accidental reward seems to diminish the essential reward a person gains for virtue: someone who acts virtuously without hope for a reward — an accidental reward — is considered more virtuous than someone who does the same thing but hopes for an accidental reward from it. And he concludes, putting it directly and without qualification: 'The person who is *not* accidentally rewarded is rewarded more essentially than the one who *is* accidentally rewarded'. By hoping for heavenly reward, therefore, we diminish our virtue.[27] This line of thought also underlies Pomponazzi's answer to the problem about choosing death: 'because the greatest virtue is acquired in choosing death for the fatherland, for one's friends, or to avoid vice, and it helps others greatly, since people naturally praise an act of this sort, and nothing is more precious or more happy than virtue itself, it [death under such circumstances] is very much worthy of choice'.[28]

Pomponazzi's thought experiment with unbelief has taken him into dangerous waters: Does not this conclusion point to the view, held by a minority of scholars today, that Pomponazzi really is a mortalist? But, in fact, when he returns to the same problem in the two works he wrote to reply to attacks on *De immortalitate*, he shows that he has used his thought experiment with unbelief to come to a better understanding of the Christian position. Rather than contrasting Christians being good in the hope of a reward with pagans acting well for virtue's own sake, he now, discussing the person faced with the choice of death or committing a grave sin, declares:

> The Catholic Faith, natural reason, and good morals demand that we should choose death rather than commit a [...] grave sin [...]. Even supposing that the soul were mortal, according to the orthodox faith one should desire to become nothing

[27] Pomponazzi, *De immortalitate animae*, ed. by Raimondi and Valverde, 14. 25–27 (pp. 1070–72).

[28] Pomponazzi, *De immortalitate animae*, ed. by Raimondi and Valverde, 14. 22 (p. 1066).

rather than go against the laws of the Saviour. Moreover, those who do something because of the fear of Hell or the hope of Paradise are guilty of a very grave sin, if this is the only reason for which they are acting, and they will be excluded from the City of God, because they love God with the love of concupiscence, not that of friendship, as a wolf loves sheep, and they do not love God, but themselves.[29]

Under the pressure of the criticism aroused by his thought experiment with unbelief, Pomponazzi has modified his Christianity to include a doctrine of pure love, of the sort which Fénélon would propose in the next century.[30]

## *The Thought Experiment of No Place*

The last main example to be considered as an illustration of thought experiments about unbelief comes from a work published just one year before the *De immortalitate* — Thomas More's *Utopia*. It is reasonable — so it seems at first — to think of this whole work as a loose-sense thought experiment, in the well-established best-republic tradition: the thinker sets out to see how society can be best arranged by trying concretely to imagine the institutions of an ideal polity.[31] Since the Utopians are not Christians until More's imaginary travellers arrive there, it will also be a thought experiment about unbelief. Their unbelief is, however, by no means atheism or even a denial of the afterlife. On the contrary, while their philosophy inclines towards Epicureanism, placing human happiness especially in pleasure, they 'never dispute concerning happiness without fetching some arguments from the principles of religion' since, without these, 'they reckon that all our inquiries after happiness must be but conjectural and defective'. Were it not for the promise of heavenly reward and punishment, then everyone would simply seek the greatest pleasure, whether lawful or not.[32] This conclusion, however, introduces a note of tension, since it suggests that the rational consideration which leads the Utopians to accept the religious principle of post-mortem reward and punishment is precisely the fact that they are needed to act as restraints in this way. Although we are told that

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[29] Pomponazzi, *Apologia*, ed. by Raimondi and Valverde, I. 9. 7 (pp. 1384–86); cf. *Defensorium*, ed. by Raimondi and Valverde, 16. 13 (pp. 1740–42).

[30] On Fénélon, see Gouhier, *Fénélon philosophe*, esp. pp. 83–92.

[31] For a best-state reading of *Utopia*, see e.g. J. H. Hexter's introduction to More, *Utopia*, ed. by Surtz and Hexter.

[32] More, *Utopia*, ed. by Surtz and Hexter, II (p. 160, l. 26 – p. 162, l. 7).

the Utopians regard deniers of human immortality as subhuman, More does not supply them with any rational argument for immortality.[33]

The way in which the presentation of the Utopians' religio-philosophical views is allowed to undermine itself raised the question whether this is really a thought experiment about unbelief at all, just as, more widely, a careful look at the distasteful aspects of Utopian society — its lack of freedom, aggressive behaviour in war, and the practice of euthanasia — throws doubt on the whole work's being a best-republic thought experiment. Even loose-sense thought experiments move to establish certain views. More seems rather to be laying traps for the reader who follows his ostensible train of thought. He is engaged less in an experiment, trying to discover something new, than in an attempt to disturb his careful readers, dislodging their certainties without discovering any new ones. In short, *Utopia* functions too much as a sophisticated piece of writing, which courts different, conflicting interpretations, to accommodate the essentially straightforward investigation involved in thought experiments.

## No Place for Thought Experiments?

*Utopia*, then, turns out not to be a thought experiment, but there is a replacement for it at hand. These pages, following on from my introduction, themselves present an extended thought experiment, though it is one about belief rather than unbelief and concerns, not the Middle Ages, but myself, a medievalist. I have written as if I believed that it is not only helpful to use 'thought experiment' to talk about medieval philosophy, but also to extend this use of the term by giving it a loose as well as a strict sense. But, in fact, I reject the second claim and accept the first only in a very qualified sense.

The term 'thought experiment' may be useful for contemporary analytical philosophers, even though its extension is wide and rather uncertain. There is certainly no agreed definition of a thought experiment, and many different varieties are recognized.[34] But, in practice, most trained philosophers have a

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[33] See Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, pp. 268–72, for more detailed discussion of More's attitude to pagans and bibliography on the various approaches different scholars have taken.

[34] For a classification, with particular regard to scientific thought experiments, see Brown, 'Thought Experiments since the Scientific Revolution'; and see the useful theoretical discussion (which also considers thought experiments in ancient and medieval philosophy) in Roux, 'Introduction'. It would be very hard to fit the supposed loose-sense thought experiments into any of Brown's categories; perhaps some of them might, however, fulfil Roux's criterion (p. 24)

notion of what is and what is not a thought experiment, and they are able to use thought experiments as effective tools in their discussions.[35] Historians of medieval philosophy who share this training in contemporary philosophy are apt to recognize passages in the texts they study as thought experiments. When they take care to specify exactly what type of thought experiment they have in mind, and to register the differences between the starting point of the medieval thinkers and today's philosophical thought experimenters, then the label serves a useful purpose.[36] Often, however, they talk of 'thought experiments' without such precautions, probably because the term makes the antiquated discussions seem more relevant to the interests of contemporary philosophers. For example, an *Introduction* to medieval philosophy published in the last decade happily uses this term, about not just Boethius's argument supposing that God does not exist (discussed above), but also the physical speculations of early Muʻtazilites, a philosophical fable by Ibn Tufayl, later medieval *sophismata*, and the theological game of obligations.[37] These are all examples of reasoning involving counterfactuals, but they have little in common otherwise. Is anything gained in such cases, except for a specious impression of modernity, by using a vague contemporary label?[38] There is even less justification for expanding the range of the term to include so-called loose-sense thought experiments in a variety of medieval texts. As the final, putative example, More's *Utopia*, illustrated, the thickness which distinguishes such thought experiments from the strict variety tends to produce texts which move so far away from the idea of experiment that the label becomes entirely inappropriate. It is, of course, open to suggest that

that they 'are designed for framing a specific, preconceived thought goal, or that they have a well-determined cognitive intention'.

[35] Some contemporary philosophers are, however, critical of the use of thought experiments in areas such as ethics or personal identity: see, e.g., Wilkes, *Real People*, pp. 1–48.

[36] Two examples of this careful use of the notion of thought experiment are King, 'Mediaeval Thought-Experiments' and Perler, 'Thought Experiments'. The medieval passages most similar to what are now called thought experiments are probably those dealing with idea in natural science in the fourteenth century (the main subject of King's article). But, as Christophe Grellard has shown ('Thought Experiments in Late Medieval Debates on Atomism', pp. 74–77), some of these authors themselves rejected the whole procedure on epistemological grounds.

[37] Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 40, 66, 181–82, 319, 322. But there are other culprits!

[38] Consider, for example, Knuuttila and Kukkonen, 'Thought Experiments and Indirect Proofs': this is a most illuminating treatment of arguments with impossible premises in Aristotle, Averroes, Aquinas, and Buridan. The article itself hardly alludes to the idea of thought experiments, and nothing would be lost if the term were not used at all (except that it has to be, because the article is in a collection about the methodology of thought experiments!).

'thought experiment' should be used in a yet looser way, which would allow even so thick a fiction as that of *Utopia* to be considered one — this, indeed, seems to have been the editors' intention when they approached the contributors to the present volume.[39] But the same results could have been obtained, with less risk of confusion, without recourse to the term 'thought experiment'.

It may seem to tell against this conclusion that the examples discussed above of wide-sense thought experiments do seem to raise common problems about a fascinating area which deserves more study — the area at which, in their different ways, the various contributors to this volume are looking: the borderline between the two areas usually distinguished as medieval philosophy and medieval literature. But it is not the idea of thought experiments that has directed us towards them, but rather the topic of unbelief, which received both philosophical and literary treatments in the Long Middle Ages, and also some, such as those examined here, that seem to be both and neither. Charting the relationship between medieval philosophy and literature — and examining whether we should even be using these terms to describe the material — is a difficult task. We should not make our work more difficult by talking about 'thought experiments', a notion that belongs to contemporary philosophy, and even there is of uncertain value.

[39] See note 1 above and Morton's introduction to this volume.

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# Can Thought Experiments Backfire?
# Avicenna's Flying Man, Self-Knowledge,
# and the Experience of Allegory in
# Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de vie humaine*

Marco Nievergelt

G uillaume de Deguileville's popular *Pèlerinage de vie humaine* (two versions, *PVH1*, *c*. 1331, and *PVH2*, *c*. 1355–56) is nearly always thought of as an essentially didactic poem, where moral instruction is dramatized and cast as an allegorical pilgrimage narrative, in turn framed by a dream vision.[1] After his initial vision of the New Jerusalem, the clumsy pilgrim-narrator dreams that he sets out on a quest to reach the heavenly city. He first encounters personified abstractions such as Sapience, Reason, Nature, or Grace,

[1] References throughout are to the first and more popular version of the *Pèlerinage*, ed. by Stürzinger, hence given as *PVH1*, with English translations from Guillaume de Deguileville, *The Pilgrimage of Human Life*, trans. by Clasby (cited by page number), with occasional emendations of mine. For the second version, *PVH2*, see the recent edition by Maupeu and

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who provide rudimentary instruction in Church doctrine and assorted questions regarding the pilgrim's soul and his salvation. After arriving at a parting of the ways, the pilgrim chooses the 'voie senestre' (*PVH1*, l. 6517), enters the path of Idleness (Oiseuse), and is soon attacked by the seven deadly sins. After the attacks of the sins, the pilgrim eventually repents, arrives on the shores of the Sea of the World, and finally boards the Ship of Religion, an allegory of the monastic life. At first sight, then, the poem appears to construct a psychomachic quest narrative to provide pastoral instruction for its lay readers, and indeed the poet invites us to approach the poem from such an angle: the narrator explicitly presents himself as a Cistercian monk at the start of his poem, safely ensconced in the abbey of Chaalis where he experiences his dream, and his narrative is cast as a *predicatio* delivered over four consecutive days to a flock of assembled laypeople (*PVH1*, ll. 15–34, 5055–66, 9046–54, 11395–406).[2]

The pilgrim journey functions essentially as a narrative transposition of the Augustinian notion of human life as a pilgrimage, leading from a *regio dissimilitudinis* back to a divine homeland. Several critics have therefore commented on these broadly Platonic, intellectually conservative underpinnings of Deguileville's poetic project.[3] The poem, however, also tries to do much more than providing its readers with moral instruction. Rather than merely being a didactic poem in the narrow, reductive sense of the term — an instrumental narrative with a simple, unambiguous moral lesson to teach — the *Pèlerinage* also aims to illuminate the mechanisms of human cognition itself: instead of merely transmitting knowledge in a direct and simple manner, the poem is far more interested in exploring how we learn, and how we acquire knowledge of specifically moral, metaphysical, and theological truths, or indeed how such knowledge crystallizes, comes to be, or simply happens in an individual subject or *viator*. As well as being a journey towards some form of higher, spiritual

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Edwards. For an overview of the state of research, see two recent volumes: Kablitz and Peters, *Mittelalterliche Literatur als Retextualisierung* and Kamath and Nievergelt, *The Pèlerinage Allegories of Guillaume de Deguileville*.

[2] On the significance of the narrator's adoption of the role of preacher, see Maupeu, *Pèlerins de Vie Humaine*, pp. 98, 107–18, and Nievergelt, 'From *disputatio* to *predicatio* — and Back Again'.

[3] Kay, *The Place of Thought*, ch. 3, 'The Divided Path in Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de Vie Humaine*: Separation and Identity', pp. 70–94; Nievergelt, 'From *disputatio* to *predicatio* — and Back Again'. The poem's overall design and its broadly Augustinian sensibility resonate in part with Bonaventure's influential *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Boehner, trans. by Hayes; cf. Gustav Zamore's essay in this volume.

truth, then, the pilgrim's quest also figures a journey of self-discovery, exploring the cognitive mechanisms at work in the *viator* himself. Cast as a first-person dream-vision narrative, the poem as a whole is ideally suited to exploring cognitive processes from an experiential, nearly phenomenological point of view. Readers are therefore invited to define knowledge itself not so much as a discrete identifiable object, but as a process that is experienced by the poem's first-person protagonist/dreamer/narrator, and through the latter by the readers themselves.

Given its pointed attention to cognitive mechanisms, Deguileville's account of the *viator*'s quest also resonates with roughly contemporary scholastic discussions of human cognition.[4] Scholastic theologians too, despite the predominantly Aristotelian orientation of their analyses, inherited Augustine's paradigmatic formulation of the human subject as wayfarer: the human subject is again imagined as a *viator* engaged in a quest, seeking to bridge the gap between indirect, ordinary, imperfect knowledge of God in the current existential condition of alienation (*in via*), and the enjoyment of a full, definitive knowledge of God at the moment of divine presence after the resurrection (*in patria*).[5] As I argue in what follows, Deguileville's exploration of human cognition appears to be conducted in dialogue with more recent theological and philosophical analyses. Importantly, however, it would be misleading to see the *Pèlerinage* as a simple dramatization of specific scholastic formulations, arguments, or positions. Rather, Deguileville's poem appropriates a number of scholastic elements only to redeploy them in a rather different context, where such elements often acquire a new, modified significance.

In what follows I would like to present a case study of one such element, the 'Flying Man' thought experiment, originally introduced by Avicenna and adapted by a number of later scholastic writers in the Christian West during the thirteenth century. This specific example is particularly resonant for a whole range of reasons. First, it helps us to illuminate the *Pèlerinage* itself, since it not only marks a crucial transition in the protagonist's journey, but also constitutes an important keystone in the poem's anthropology, metaphysics, and epistemology. Second, it touches on a set of controversial questions concerning the nature of the human rational soul and its cognitive abilities — questions

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[4] On the need for further research on Deguileville's learning and his sources — literary, scholastic, pastoral, monastic, patristic — see especially Duval, 'Interpréter le *Pèlerinage de Vie Humaine*'.

[5] On the Augustinian origins of this symbolic framework adopted by scholastic theologians, see for instance Kitanov, *Beatific Enjoyment in Medieval Scholastic Debates*, especially pp. 1–18.

that played a hugely important role in philosophical and theological debates in the Latin West throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Third, this case study emphasizes the slipperiness of thought experiments themselves and their role in medieval scholastic discussions and beyond: as has been noted, the precise argumentative function, demonstrative potential, and logical status of thought experiments is often highly unsettled,[6] a feature that is exacerbated when thought experiments are lifted out of their original context in a piece of philosophical writing and transplanted into an allegorical dream-poem. Elsewhere in this volume Philip Knox illustrates how vernacular dream-poetry can use thought experiments to stage a carefully controlled test of the implications and ramifications of inherited philosophical positions. My own discussion, by contrast, emphasizes how in such a fictional context thought experiments can also develop a life of their own: the Flying Man thought experiment in the *Pèlerinage de vie humaine* appears to support a doctrine that is finally at odds both with the poem's overarching epistemology and with its original purpose in Avicenna's writings. This profoundly destabilizes the poem itself from the inside, but also invites us to reconsider the complex relationship of such 'literary' works to scholastic discourse more broadly, and suggests that such vernacular materials can help us to write a less teleological but more nuanced, pluralistic, and dynamic kind of intellectual history.

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The early sections of the pilgrim's quest are specifically concerned with defining the pilgrim's cognitive abilities (*PVH1*, ll. 1–7032). This requires the exploration of a number of fundamental ontological questions, which in turn determine the pilgrim's powers of knowledge and understanding. The leitmotif of this particular section of the poem is essentially the need for self-knowledge, understood as a necessary preparatory stage preceding the *viator*'s actual pilgrimage through the world of sin and temptation. The virtues of self-knowledge are here extolled by Reason, the pilgrim's guide during the episode I would like to discuss (*PVH1*, ll. 5733–6502; cf. *PVH2* 6255–6962). As Reason states, 'Miex vaut assez connoistre soy | Qu'estre empereur, conte ne roy' (ll. 5937–38; 'it is much more valuable to know oneself, than to be a count, emperor, or a king', p. 81), and she accordingly initiates a process of self-examination: 'Ses tu, dist elle, qui tu es, | Se tu es seul ou doubles es[?]' (ll. 5733–34; '"Do you know

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[6] See especially Roux, 'Introduction', and further studies gathered in this volume.

who you are", she asked, "whether you are single or double?", p. 78). It quickly turns out that

> Tu doiz savoir que tu nourris
> Cil qui est tes grans anemis.
> [...]
> Pour toi servir baillie te fu,
> Mes tu ses sers es devenu. (ll. 5747–48; 5755–56).

[You should know that you nourish someone who is your great enemy. [...]
He was given to you to serve you, but you have become his servant.] (p. 78)

Misunderstanding Reason's explanation, the rather obtuse pilgrim initially wishes to go out and eliminate this rebellious servant:

> Dame, dis je, son non pour quoi
> Ne me dites vous sans delai,
> Quar prestement je m'en venjasse
> Et tantost tuer je l'alasse. (ll. 5843–46)

[Lady, I said, why do you not tell me his name straight away, for I would take quick revenge on him and go and kill him now.] (p. 79)

Reason, however, proceeds to inform the pilgrim that the enemy is in reality his own body, which determines the pilgrim's profoundly self-divided nature:

> volente
> tu as double et double pense.
> [...]
> Donques, dist elle, n'es pas seulz,
> Ains toi et ton cors estes .II. (ll. 5917–18; 5925–26).

[Then you have two wills and you are of two minds. [...]
Then you are not alone, she said, and so you and your body are two.] (p. 80)

Reason here clearly advocates a form of Augustinian substance dualism, postulating the existence of body and soul as two separable, if not usually separate, substances. Variations of Augustinian substance dualism constituted the default position of medieval thinkers on the soul before the absorption of Aristotle's writings on psychology and natural science in the West, mediated by Arabic commentators.[7] Rejecting the dualistic, Platonic account of the nature of the

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[7] I have relied on the following accounts, in ascending order of complexity and detail pro-

human soul more firmly than Augustine, Aristotle proposed a more strongly hylomorphic model of the man: the soul here was defined as the form that is the actuality on the potentiality of a natural body (*De anima* II. 1, 412a27–28), determining the inseparable nature of the body–soul compound (*De anima* II. 1, 413a4–5). As stated by the decree from the Council of Vienne in 1312, the New Aristotelian orthodoxy on the soul was that 'substantia animae rationalis seu intellectivae […] sit forma corporis humani per se et essentialiter' (the substance of the rational or intellective soul is the form of the human body in itself and essentially).[8] The formulation is authoritative and had reached nearly universal acceptance by the early fourteenth century, yet it still posed formidable challenges for medieval commentators. Aristotle's own considerations on the soul in the *De anima* were 'notoriously murky',[9] and cannot be said to present anything approximating a tightly unified and unambiguously exposed theory of the soul. Indeed the *De anima* itself has been referred to as Aristotle's 'most frustratingly incoherent and incomplete […] work',[10] and commentators from the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries grappled with the endless difficulties created by Aristotle's hylomorphic account of the human soul–body compound. Rather than witnessing a switch or even a slow transition from a dualist to a hylomorphic model of the soul, then, it would be more accurate to observe that thirteenth-century commentators attempted to synthesize and harmonize the Augustinian, dualist model with the Aristotelian, hylomorphic one. The question of the nature, internal structure, and faculties of the human soul took up an absolutely central place in philosophical and theological speculation on the whole. The issue was of crucial importance, since the very conditions under which the disciplines of philosophy, theology, and natural science could in fact exist were determined by the functions and faculties of the human soul. The challenge of defining what knowledge is, and how the soul obtains different kinds of knowledge, accordingly preoccupies nearly every single scholastic thinker in the thirteenth century.

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vided: Haldane, 'Soul and Body'; King, 'Body and Soul'; King, 'Why Isn't the Mind-Body Problem Medieval?'; Pasnau, 'The Mind-Soul Problem'; Pasnau, 'Mind and Hylomorphism'; Stone, 'The Soul's Relation to the Body'; Bieniak, *The Soul–Body Problem at Paris, ca. 1200–1250*; Dales, *The Problem of the Rational Soul*; De Boer, *The Science of the Soul*.

[8] See *Enchiridion symbolorum*, ed. by Denzinger and Schönmetzer, no. 902 (old 481). On the impact of the decree, see Duba, 'The Souls after Vienne'.

[9] Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 12.

[10] Dales, *The Problem of the Rational Soul*, p. 9.

Despite the generalized tendency to synthesize and accommodate these two accounts of the soul and its relationship to the body, the thirteenth century witnessed the emergence of two broadly divergent models of cognition, abstractive and illuminationist. Theories of abstractive cognition were more strongly influenced by Aristotle and insisted on the centrality of 'empirical' processes of knowledge transmission: in such a model knowledge is essentially 'abstracted' from sense perception, relayed by the sense organs to the internal senses in the sensitive/animal soul, where such information is processed.[11] Illuminationist models, on the other hand, were elaborated on the basis of Augustine's theory of divine illumination: according to illuminationists the human rational soul could receive knowledge directly from a divine source, unmediated by sense perception. Moreover, illumination was also thought to be essential for ordinary cognitive processes, as a means to 'validate' information abstracted from acts of sense perception.[12]

This tension between abstractive and illuminationist theories of cognition provides the main philosophical context for Reason's explicit rejection of the dominant, Aristotelian account of the soul in Deguileville's poem. As I've already anticipated, Deguileville's Reason advocates a form of Augustinian substance dualism, but she also characterizes the soul's cognitive abilities in clearly illuminationist terms. Images of light abound throughout this passage (e.g. ll. 6038–6100) and serve to emphasize the internal enlightenment of the human understanding available to the soul independently from the mediation of bodily sense perception:

> Quar tu vois, et non pas le cors
> Qui avugle est et ens et hors
> Ja mais nulle rien ne verroit,
> Se par ta lumiere n'estoit. (ll. 6099–6102)

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[11] On broadly Aristotelian theories of perception and their scholastic reception, see e.g. Smith, 'Perception'; Hasse, 'The Soul's Faculties'; several essays in Knuuttila and Kärkkäinen, *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*. More specifically on the internal senses, see Lagerlund, *Forming the Mind* and Di Martino, *Ratio Particularis*. For a recent case study with extensive discussion of the wider context, see Toivanen, *Perception and the Internal Senses*.

[12] It's important to stress that we are not talking about the clash of two 'schools', Augustinians and Aristotelians, as older historiographical work on the period tended to suggest. On such historiographical problems and evolving debates, see especially Marrone, *The Light of thy Countenance*, I, 1–25. For more general overviews of theories of divine illumination, see e.g. Black, 'The Nature of Intellect'; Noone, 'Divine Illumination'; Owens, 'Faith, Ideas, Illumination, and Experience'.

[For it is you who can see, not the body, which is blind both inside and out. It
would never see anything, if it were not by your light.] (p. 83)

> [Raison]: Mont bien croi
> que peu m'entens. Scez tu pour quoi?
> C'est pour le cors qui au devant
> Fait un obstacle espes et grant. (ll. 6177–80)

[[Reason]: I am sure you do not understand me very well. Do you know why?
Because the body is a thick and heavy obstacle in your way.] (p. 84)

Reason insists repeatedly on the metaphorical blindness of the body, its ten-
dency to obstruct the soul's direct apprehension of the light of transcendent
truth:

> L'ame qui habitë u cors
> Sa clarte espant par dehors
> Et fait cuidier aus foles gens
> Que tout li enluminemens
> Soit de la povre nuee
> Dont l'ame est obnubilee.
> Mais se la nuee n'estoit,
> L'ame si grant lumiere aroit
> Qu'elle verroit tout plainement
> D'orient jusqu'en occident
> Elle verroit et cognoistroit
> Son createur et aimeroit. (ll. 6063–74)

[The soul that lives in the body shines outward and makes foolish people think that
everything is illuminated by the poor cloud that obscures the soul. But if there were
no cloud, the soul would have such great light that it would see quite plainly from
east to west, and it would see and know and love its creator.] (p. 82)

The body here is a screen, a cloud, or a vapour 'obnubilating' (l. 6068), literally
'clouding over' the soul's cognitive faculties.[13] Finally the body even threatens

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[13] The use of the term 'obnubilee' itself, on three occasions in *PVH1* (ll. 6068, 6279, 11304)
and elsewhere in Deguileville's poetic corpus, provides further evidence for Deguileville's direct
engagement with scholastic accounts of cognition. The term translates the Latin *obnobilata*,
used for instance by Robert Grosseteste in his commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*, in a closely
analogous context to designate the inhibiting effect of the body on the powers of the soul. See
Grosseteste, *Commentarius in Posteriorum Analyticorum libros*, ed. by Rossi, i. 14, ll. 228–35.
Deguileville provides the earliest attestation for the use of the term in French. See *DMF*, s.v.

to obscure man's divine likeness, the *imago dei* carried within the soul — an *imago* from which the pilgrim's body is emphatically excluded:

> Le cors forsclos dont t'ai parle
> Et de touz poins hors separe,
> Tu ez de Dieu la pourtraiture
> Et l'ymage et la faiture.
> [...]
> il te fist bel et cler voiant
> Legier plus quë oysel volant,
> Immortel sans ja mais mourir
> Et permanant sans defenir. (ll. 5945–48; 5953–56)

[Apart from your body — I have spoken about that and it is set apart in every way — you are the picture, the image and likeness of God. [...] He made you beautiful and clear-sighted, lighter than the bird on the wing, immortal, never to die, enduring forever.] (p. 81)

Deguileville's views on the soul, articulated here through the mouthpiece of Reason, can thus be described as a relatively standard combination of Augustinian substance dualism and illuminationism. At first sight, it would seem unnecessary to postulate any strictly scholastic source for such views, and indeed Deguileville would have been able to access such doctrines in a wide range of earlier, mostly twelfth-century treatises on the soul, many of which were Cistercian in origin.[14] Yet to put forward such views in 1331 — well after the demise of theories of divine illumination in strictly scholastic circles, and after the Council of Vienne in 1312 — must be interpreted as a clearly anti-Aristotelian move.[15] More striking than Reason's views as such, however, are the means employed to transmit her teaching, both to the pilgrim-protagonist

'obnubiler'. The term 'obnuble' also occurs, with far more general connotations, in Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la rose* (ll. 4755, 4766, 19042, 20423–24), ed. by Lecoy.

[14] First among these would be the hugely popular pseudo-Augustinian *De spiritu et anima*, but also works like Isaac of Stella's *Epistola de anima*, William of St Thierry's *De naturae corporis et animae*, or Hugh of St Victor's *De unione corporis et spiritus*. See further McGinn, *Three Treatises on Man*, including translations of the first three of these. Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De anima' in the Latin West*, pp. 9–12, also points to the wide availability of such ideas since the twelfth century and to their remarkable affinity with Avicenna's theory of soul.

[15] Deguileville's resistance to Aristotelian science in the broadest sense is also confirmed by Deguileville's humorous treatment of the figure of Aristotle himself elsewhere in his poem (*PVH1*, ll. 2917–3300), on which see Kamath, 'Rewriting Ancient *Auctores*' and Nievergelt, 'From *disputatio* to *predicatio* — and Back Again'.

and to the reader. It is here that the poem stages a rather spectacular thought experiment, which marks a central transition in the protagonist's quest but also functions as a keystone for the poem's overarching anthropology, ontology, and epistemology.[16] This appears to be based on Avicenna's influential Flying Man thought experiment, to which I turn below, but differs from Avicenna's version in some important, indeed crucial ways.

Reason has recourse to this thought experiment to persuade the pilgrim of his dual nature, after all of her theoretical explanations have left the pilgrim incredulous and perplexed. Reason first employs figurative language and analogy: the soul is hidden and shadowed by the body like the sun behind a cloud (ll. 6038–50), or is like the light inside a smoky lantern (ll. 6051–74), or is enveloped by the body like the body is enveloped by clothes (ll. 6115–38), or is the invisible steersman leading the ship along its right course (ll. 6139–58). The pilgrim remains dissatisfied with Reason's analogies and is finally unable to visualize and understand the duality of body and soul. He eventually asks to be shown not figures for that duality, but duality itself:

> Se vouliez pour moy tant faire
> Que moy de ma nef m'ostissiez
> Et du cors me despoullissiez,
> Que me moustrissiez ce contrait,
> Cel avugle qui tant meffait
> [...]
> A fin que je peusse *esprouver*
> Ce que vous dites et *trouver*. (ll. 6162–66; 6169–70; my emphases)

[If you would be so kind as to take me out of my boat and divest me of my body, show me this lame and blind creature that has done me such harm so many times [...] so that I might *prove and confirm* what you have said.] (pp. 83–84)

By asking to be literally 'lifted from his ship', the pilgrim also expresses his frustration with the allegorical imagery employed by Reason. He would like to

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[16] Other scholars have attracted attention to this conspicuous passage. For Maupeu this 'cognitive ecstasy' in *PVH1* marks an important moment in a journey towards contemplative self-renunciation, while simultaneously establishing an embryonic individual identity that is more strongly affirmed in the revised version of the poem, *PVH2*; see *Pèlerins de Vie Humaine*, pp. 163–70, 174–96. For Kamath the body-soul separation constitutes the spark that ignites Deguileville's project of authorial construction, as response to the *Roman de la Rose*; see *Authorship and First-Person Allegory*, pp. 32–35. For Kay, *The Place of Thought*, pp. 85–90, the episode manifests the paradoxical and fragmented nature of the pilgrim's 'I' as a body-soul compound, in ways that resonate closely with my conclusions below.

experience this fundamental ontological truth directly and immediately, not through mere figures and analogies. Reason eventually satisfies his request, stressing however that it does not lie within her powers to effect a permanent 'sequestration' of the soul from the body (ll. 6191–92). The soul is then disengaged from the body for a brief instant, and the description of the struggle is accordingly dramatic, rich in evocative physical detail:

> Adonc mist main a moi Raison
> Et je me mis a son bandon,
> Elle sacha et je boutai,
> Tant fiz, tant fist et li et moy
> Que le contrait fut trebuchie
> De dessur moy et deschargie.
> Quant destrousse ainsi je fu,
> En l'air en haut tout ravi fu;
> Bien me sembloit que je volasse
> Et que nulle rien ne pesasse.
> A mon gre partout aloie,
> Et sus et jus et loing vëoie.
> Rien au monde, ce me sembloit,
> Mucie ne cele ne m'estoit. (ll. 6199–6212)

[Then Reason took hold of me and I put myself at her command. She pulled and I pushed, and we made such an effort, she and I, that the crippled one was lifted off me and fell away. When I was unburdened in this way, I was carried off high into the air. It seemed to me that I was flying and that I weighed nothing. I could go everywhere I wanted, both up and down, and I could see far away. It seemed that nothing in the world was hidden or concealed from me.] (p. 84)

The description of the disembodied soul here provides a close analogue for Avicenna's Flying Man thought experiment — with important, indeed crucial differences, as will be seen. The thought experiment is found in multiple places in Avicenna's work, but its most conspicuous use occurs in the first chapter of his *De anima* treatise, as translated into Latin by Dominicus Gundissalinus and Avendauth in Toledo at some point between 1152 and 1166.[17] The thought experiment presents itself as follows:

Dicimus igitur quod aliquis ex nobis putare debet quasi subito creatus esset et perfectus, sed velato visu suo ne exteriora videret, et creatus esset sic quasi moveretur in aere aut in inani, ita ut eum non tangeret spissitudo aeris quam ipse sentire posset,

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[17] For an account of the influence of this text, see Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De anima' in the Latin West*.

et quasi essent disiuncta membra eius ita ut non concurrerent sibi nec continger-
ent sese. Deinde videat si affirmat esse suae essentiae: non enim dubitabit affirmare
se esse, nec tamen affirmabit exteriora suorum membrorum, nec occulta suorum
interiorum nec animum nec cerebrum, nec aliquid aliud extrinsecus, sed affirmabit
se esse, cuius non affirmabit longitudinem nec latitudinem nec spissitudinem. Si
autem, in illa hora, possibile esset ei imaginari manum aut aliud membrum, non
tamen imaginaretur illud esse partem sui nec necessarium suae essentiae. Tu autem
scis quod id quod affirmatur, aliud est ab eo quod non affirmatur, et concessum
aliud est ab eo quod non conceditur. Et, quoniam essentia quam affirmat esse est
propria illi, eo quod illa est ipsemet, et est praeter corpus eius et membra eius quae
non affirmat, ideo expergefactus habet viam evigilandi ad sciendum quod esse ani-
mae aliud est quam esse corporis; immo non eget corpore ad hoc ut sciat animam
et percipiat eam; si autem fuerit stupidus, opus habet converti ad viam.

[We say, therefore, that one of us must imagine himself as created all at once and
perfect but with his sight veiled from seeing external things, and that he is created
as moving in the air or the void so that the density of the air, which he could per-
ceive, would not touch him, and that he is created with his limbs separate in such
a way that they neither meet nor touch each other. He must then see if he affirms
the existence of his essence. He would not hesitate to affirm that he exists, but
he would not affirm anything external about his members, nor anything hidden
about what is inside him, neither his mind nor his brain, nor anything external
whatsoever. But he would affirm that he exists without affirming his length, width,
or depth. If he were able at that time to imagine a hand or some other member, he
would not imagine it to be a part of him or necessary to his essence. Now, you know
that what is affirmed is different from what is not affirmed and what is granted is
different from what is not granted. And because the essence that he affirms to exist
is proper to him in that it is himself and in addition to the body, he who is attentive
has the means to be awakened to knowing that the being of the soul is different
from the being of the body; indeed, he does not need the body in order to know
and perceive the soul. If he were ignorant of it, he would need to be put back on
the right track.][18]

The resemblance is striking, in terms of the details of the thought experi-
ment, its broad argumentative purpose, and its narrative context. The conclu-
sive remark of Avicenna's thought experiment — arguing for the need for the
errant *viator* to be put back on the 'right track', or indeed to be 'converted'
(*convertire ad viam*) — certainly provides an apt gloss on Deguileville's poem:
here Reason's benevolent if rather patronizing lessons about the soul (esp.

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[18] Avicenna, *Liber de anima*, ed. Van Riet, I. 1. 49–68 (I, 36–37). I have used the translation
proposed in Toivanen, 'The Fate of the Flying Man', p. 67, with slight emendation.

ll. 5733–6198) are intended precisely to ensure that the pilgrim does not stray from the assigned course of his pilgrimage. Also the larger philosophical implications of the Flying Man thought experiment, and Avicenna's views on the soul more widely, appear to be eminently well suited for Deguileville's immediate purpose. Indeed, the success of Avicenna's *De anima* in the West is often explained with reference to the remarkable convergence of Avicenna's markedly Neoplatonic take on Aristotelian faculty psychology, and specifically his views on the nature of the agent intellect, with the substance dualism and illuminationism of Augustine. Etienne Gilson famously went as far as postulating the existence of an 'augustinisme avicennisant' to explain the late thirteenth-century resistance to the rise of more strongly Aristotelian accounts of the soul. While Gilson's views have been nuanced by more recent critics, who emphasize the far more fluid and less polarized atmosphere of late thirteenth-century scholasticism on the whole, the appeal of Avicenna's psychology for thinkers of a broadly Augustinian cast is undeniable.[19] If we accept the argument presented here, Deguileville himself provides remarkable evidence for a continuing interest in Avicenna's psychology beyond the circles of strictly scholastic thinking.

It is difficult to assess whether Avicenna's *De anima* constitutes a direct or indirect source, or merely an analogue for Deguileville's cognitive ecstasy. Direct or indirect influence is by no means unlikely, since Avicenna's treatise acquired a relatively wide circulation in the Latin West during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and survives in fifty manuscripts, fourteen of which were produced in the fourteenth century.[20] But Deguileville's source for this thought experiment need not have been Avicenna's *De anima* itself, since numerous scholastic authors in the West redeployed Avicenna's thought experiment in their own writings on the soul: Gundissalinus — author of his own *De anima* treatise as well as translator of Avicenna's — but also William of Auvergne, Jean de la Rochelle, Peter of Spain, Matthew of Aquasparta, and Vital du Four, all adopted the Flying Man thought experiment in their own writings on the soul.[21] Here again it is revealing that many scholastic authors

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[19] Gilson, 'Les Sources gréco-arabes de l'augustinisme avicennisant'. On the question, see further Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De anima' in the Latin West*, esp. pp. 203–23 and passim; Toivanen, 'The Fate of the Flying Man'; Brown, 'Aquinas' Missing Flying Man'; Black, 'The Nature of Intellect', pp. 324–26, 329; Noone, 'Divine Illumination', pp. 372–73; Marrone, *The Light of thy Countenance*, I, 1–25.

[20] Avicenna, *Liber de anima*, ed. by Van Riet, I, 75*–110*, II, 105*–121*; Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De anima' in the Latin West*, pp. 7–8.

[21] See especially Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De anima' in the Latin West*, pp. 80–92, and Toivanen, 'The Fate of the Flying Man'.

use the Flying Man in direct conjunction with quotations from Augustinian or pseudo-Augustinian sources.[22] A particularly likely source for Deguileville appears to be Jean de la Rochelle: his treatise on the soul was by far the most influential of the group (fifty manuscripts), he uses the thought experiment in a highly conspicuous place as the opening gambit in the very first *quaestio* of his treatise, and his overall sensibility appears to come closest to Deguileville's.[23] In any case the thought experiment was rather popular, and it has been argued that the Flying Man would have been common knowledge for a whole generation of late thirteenth-century scholastics.[24]

A closer look at the different scholastic versions of the Flying Man, however, brings to light interesting, potentially radical differences in orientation. This raises a number of problematic questions about the actual argumentative purpose and logical status of the thought experiment itself — problems that are exacerbated in Deguileville's retelling of this experiment in the context of a dream-vision poem, as I will illustrate below. The purpose of the thought

[22] See Toivanen, 'The Fate of the Flying Man', pp. 79 and 82, commenting respectively on Jean de la Rochelle and Matthew of Aquasparta. Jean de la Rochelle, *Summa de anima*, ed. by Bougerol, cites not only the pseudo-Augustinian *De spiritu et anima*, but also Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*, *De diversis questionibus*, and *De trinitate* in the relevant sections of his treatise (iii. 14, v. 28).

[23] See Jean de la Rochelle, *Summa de anima*, ed. by Bougerol, i. 1. 26–41. Among other noteworthy features shared with Deguileville is Jean's insistence on the divine resemblance of the human soul (ii. 2.30–37, v. 27–35), and divine illumination (ii. 3–5), as well as his double, ontological and epistemological emphasis, on which see Toivanen, 'The Fate of the Flying Man', pp. 78–80. As noted by Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De anima' in the Latin West*, p. 220, Jean de la Rochelle's illuminationist doctrine also demonstrably influenced accounts found in later popular sources such as Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum naturale*, 27.41, pp. 1946–47, an encyclopaedia that Deguileville would almost certainly have been familiar with. Deguileville's version of the Flying Man, however, also shares a number of features with Avicenna's own account as translated by Gundissalinus, specifically the emphasis on self-knowledge, very prominent in the translator's prologue (*Liber de anima*, ed. by Van Riet, 'prologus', 4–15 (i, 3)), and the use of an extended analogy of the soul enveloped by the body, compared to a body enveloped by clothing, which Avicenna develops as he repeats the thought experiment of the Flying Man in a later section of the *Liber de anima*, ed. by Van Riet, v. 7. 51–80 (ii, 162–63), on which see Marmura, 'Avicenna's "Flying Man" in Context', pp. 389–90, cf. *PVH1*, ll. 6115–38. Deguileville's instrumental and more radically dualist attitude to corporality, on the other hand, comes closest to William of Auvergne, *The Soul*, 3. 11, trans. by Teske, pp. 139–44.

[24] On possible reasons for its conspicuous absence from the works of both Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, and their engagement with its arguments, see especially Brown, 'Aquinas' Missing Flying Man'; Scarpelli Cory, *Aquinas on Self-Knowledge*, pp. 24–26, 30–32, 183; and Scarpelli Cory, 'The Footprint of Avicenna's Flying Man'.

experiment in Avicenna himself has been the subject of some debate, and Nikolaus Hasse has provided a nuanced assessment of the passage: the main purpose of the Flying Man is to demonstrate that the soul is an independent substance, separate from the body, but the passage also implies other, ancillary doctrines developed more fully elsewhere in Avicenna's writings, namely the soul's existence, its immateriality, its substantiality, and its ability to become self-aware.[25] Yet the appeal of Avicenna's Flying Man for Western thinkers lay precisely in its indeterminacy, its ability to support a range of closely related but fundamentally different arguments and doctrines.[26] Scholastic authors accordingly exploit the thought experiment for rather different purposes, and Toivanen has recently contrasted the 'ontological' use of the Flying Man by early authors with a more 'epistemological' use by later ones: while initially the thought experiment served the purpose of demonstrating the independence thesis, later authors primarily use it to argue in favour of the soul's ability to obtain self-awareness.[27]

This move towards a more strongly epistemological use of the thought experiment suggests a growing discomfort with a more strongly dualist ontology implicit in earlier versions of the Flying Man. On the whole the later, epistemological versions of the thought experiment no longer affirmed the existence of the soul as an independent substance. In the wake of the increasingly widespread acceptance of the Aristotelian, hylomorphic model of the soul, later authors stressed that even when bodily or perceptual activity was disabled, this did not in fact suggest that the soul could ever subsist in disembodied state.[28] Indeed, it is worth noting that at least one author, Matthew of Aquasparta, used the thought experiment *a negativo*, to exemplify a thesis he then goes on to reject: Matthew pointedly dismisses the notion that the soul might be able to become aware of itself without relying on corporeally mediated *phantasmata* produced by sense perception, thus in effect contradicting Avicenna's original point.[29] This well illustrates how the Flying Man thought experiment was thus

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[25] See Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De anima' in the Latin West*, pp. 81–86. See further Black, 'Avicenna on Self-Awareness and Knowing that One Knows'; Marmura, 'Avicenna's "Flying Man" in Context'; Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna (Ibn Sînâ)*, pp. 53–79, esp. 55–59.

[26] Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De anima' in the Latin West*, p. 81, Toivanen, 'The Fate of the Flying Man', pp. 64–66 and passim.

[27] Toivanen, 'The Fate of the Flying Man'. Further on self-awareness, see Scarpelli Cory, *Aquinas on Self-Knowledge* and Putallaz, *La Connaissance de soi au XIIIᵉ siècle*.

[28] See especially the analysis of Toivanen, 'The Fate of the Flying Man', pp. 81–86, 95.

[29] Toivanen, 'The Fate of the Flying Man', pp. 81–83.

not only highly adaptable, but also fundamentally slippery in terms of the argumentative purposes it could be made to serve.

More seriously, a larger and more troubling question concerning the logical status of the Flying Man thought experiment runs through its Latin reception history as a whole — and this problem too returns to haunt Deguileville's version. Western thinkers, for one, were unable to categorize the logical status of Avicenna's Flying Man simply because they lacked the precise logical categories and terms that corresponded to Avicenna's own. This is apparent if we confront Avicenna's Flying Man with its scholastic avatars. Avicenna himself defines the thought experiment as a *tanbih* in the Arabic original, which is best translated as meaning 'a pointer', or 'hint', and one medieval Arabic–Latin translator renders this, in a different context, as a 'nod'.[30] The status of a *tanbih* becomes clearer if we refer to Avicenna's own hierarchy of methods of communicating knowledge.[31] Avicenna identifies three principal methods, all expressing the same truths, but at different levels of fullness and perfection. In ascending order we have the symbolic/allegorical method, the indicative method, and the demonstrative or expository method. The allegorical/symbolic is the most obscure and imperfect mode of communication and is defined in primarily negative terms as a strategy to conceal or withhold deeper truths from inferior minds that would misapply and misunderstand the actual teachings. The indicative method relies on pointers and allusions and is accordingly more dynamic: its main function is to point, directing the mind towards a higher knowledge that is distantly apprehended, prompting and stimulating the imperfect mind of a promising student to further inquiry. Avicenna's demonstrative method, the highest and more perfect means of accessing and communicating knowledge, is constituted by syllogistic reasoning as defined by Aristotle: here intelligibles are grasped in the intellect by correctly guessing the middle term of the syllogism. The 'Flying Man' is identified as a *tanbih*, and thus clearly falls in

[30] See Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De anima' in the Latin West*, pp. 86–87, 90–92. See also Marmura, 'Avicenna's "Flying Man" in Context', who argues that Avicenna extrapolates a categorical conclusion from what in reality is merely a hypothetical argument, and thus essentially presents an indemonstrable premise dressed up as a conclusion. Peter of Spain comes closest to Avicenna by emphasizing the imaginative nature of the thought experiment; see Toivanen, 'The Fate of the Flying Man', p. 76 n. 29.

[31] Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 335–58. For a complementary approach with a different, more positive emphasis on the role of allegory and indeed poetry in fostering the journey and ascent of the human soul in Avicenna's Arabic Neoplatonic context, see Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna* (Ibn Sînâ), pp. 80–106.

the intermediary category of the indicative method. But such nuances, and the whole epistemological system they imply, were largely lost on Latin scholastic authors. Most of them describe the thought experiment in terms that tend to assimilate it to a proof or demonstration — it is variously called a *ratio*, a *probatio*, or a *declaratio*.[32] Crucially, however, the very nature of the thought experiment, with its indicative, analogical, and counterintuitive features, precludes it from serving a strictly demonstrative function as defined by Avicenna.

It is now possible to take a closer look at Deguileville's thought experiment in comparison with its scholastic sources or analogues, in order to determine its logical status as well as its success in achieving its declared purpose — both for the pilgrim in the poem and for us as readers and fellow *viatores*. Embedded in an allegorical dream-vision poem, Deguileville's Flying Man understandably loses the argumentative precision to which its scholastic analogues aspire. The argumentative purpose of the Flying Man here is far broader, developing both its ontological and epistemological aspects, and indeed the thought experiment here also serves to introduce and support a whole range of ancillary doctrines. These include the nature of the soul as an *imago dei*, the illuminative ability of the soul, the importance of divine illumination in determining the soul's cognitive ability as an independent substance, the soul's self-sufficiency, and a remarkable theory of active cognition that closely parallels the controversial model of Peter John Olivi.[33] As I have already suggested, this thought experiment serves as a keystone of the poem's anthropology, metaphysics, and epistemology. If the poem is understood as a dynamic whole, tracing the trajectory for the *viator*'s journey towards truth, self-knowledge, and salvation, then the success of such a project hinges on this particular moment, where the ontological setup of the human subject is defined.

On the surface, the thought experiment appears to serve its pedagogical function well. The pilgrim dutifully rehearses his lesson and thanks Reason for having 'distinguished' his body from his soul:

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[32] Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De anima' in the Latin West*, pp. 90–92.

[33] The similarities between Reason's / Deguileville's theory of active perception (*PVH1*, ll. 6063–6114) and that of Olivi deserve closer attention. On Olivi's deliberately anti-Aristotelian model of cognition, specifically his rejection of *species* and his debt to Augustine, see Silva and Toivanen, 'The Active Nature of the Soul in Sense Perception' and Toivanen, *Perception and the Internal Senses*, especially pp. 115–222. It was precisely Olivi's theory that prompted the condemnation of anti-Aristotelian positions on the soul at Vienne in 1312, on which see Duba, 'The Souls after Vienne'.

Je cuidoie que moy et li [mon cors]
Fussons un, mes n'est pas ainsi.
Par vous en ay le voir apris
Selonc ce que j'en ay enquis.
[...]
Mon cors avez bien distingue
De moy et clerement monstre
Comment il m'est touz jours contraire. (ll. 6391–94; 6439–41).

[I thought that my body and I were the same, but it is not so. From you I have learned the truth, according to what I have asked about it. [...] You have distinguished me from my body well and you have shown clearly how he is always opposed to me in everything good I want to do.] (p. 87)

But what kind of logical status does Deguileville attribute to this thought experiment? Rather than being a merely theoretical, counterintuitive thought experiment, the Flying Man in the poem is presented as an actual cognitive ecstasy, an *experience* that is intended to function as an empirical demonstration of the duality of body and soul. This is a major modification of its scholastic analogues, where the soul is at best unaware of its body, or does not rely on its functions, but is never in fact separated from it.[34] But the trick seems to satisfy the pilgrim's demands to be given a tangible demonstration, 'A fin que je peusse *esprouver* | Ce que vous dites' (ll. 6169–70; see fuller quotation above). The key term here is *esprouver*: it has the Latin *probare* as its root, but in contrast to a scholastic *probatio* the term defines not demonstrative knowledge but experiential, empirical proof. It is the soul itself that directly experiences its own existence as an independent and immaterial substance capable of its own cognitive acts without use of the body. If this is still a thought experiment, then it is an experiment that has become 'thickened', as it were, into an experience that actually occurs, something that happens to the pilgrim.

Deguileville's Reason, then, supposedly enables the pilgrim to apprehend his own dual nature by actually separating body and soul. Freed from the darkening weight of the body, the soul overcomes the ordinary limitations of the pilgrim's cognitive faculties and attains a perfect and direct knowledge of itself and of its divine nature. After the body and soul have been separated, the body is accordingly lifeless and numb, deprived of any perceptual faculty as if to stress its complete lack of cognitive agency:

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[34] Another major difference concerns the fact that in most scholastic versions the human soul is imagined *at the moment of creation*, i.e. has not previously obtained any perceptual experience upon which self-awareness might depend.

> bien vi mon cors que c'estoit fiens.
> [...]
> A terre estendu se gesoit,
> Ou *il n'ooit ne ne vëoit*;
> Sa contenance signe estoit
> Qu'en li nulle vertu n'avoit. (ll. 6221; 6225–28; my emphasis)

[I saw clearly that my body was dung. [...] It lay there stretched out on the earth, and *it did not hear nor see*. Its face showed that it had no power in it.] (p. 84; slightly emended)

Yet in order to ascertain that the body is an inert instrument, the pilgrim/soul paradoxically does so by touching it:

> J'alay et ving tout entour li,
> A savoir mon së endormy
> Estoit, et *le pous li tastai*,
> Mes sachiez que je n'i trouvai
> En nerf, en conduit ne en vaine
> Ne qu'en un tronc pous ne alaine (ll. 6229–34; my emphasis)

[I circled all around it to find out if it was asleep. *I felt its pulse*, but understand that I did not find, in its nerves, conduits, and veins, any pulse or breath, any more than in a log.] (p. 84; slightly emended)

The soul's very act of reaching out to touch the inert body completely undoes the logic of the thought experiment. It seems that in order to experience its independence from the body, the rational soul relies on sense perception, specifically touch, the most bodily of the five senses. This raises profound, possibly insoluble problems, given that sense perception is clearly impossible without reliance on the body's sense organs.[35] Deguileville's notion of a rational soul 'perceiving' its own body — if understood literally and empirically as indeed we are invited to understand it[36] — is inevitably self-defeating: it reveals how the supposedly disembodied soul continues to rely on corporeally mediated sense perception. The desire to furnish a (literally) 'tangible' proof of the soul's independence from the body finally assigns a central role to the pilgrim's per-

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[35] This principle informs all scholastic accounts of sense perception and the sensitive soul. See e.g. King, 'Why Isn't the Mind-Body Problem Medieval?'.

[36] Again, the paradox is potentially present in Avicenna's *Liber de anima*, where the soul perceives (*percipiat*) itself. Deguileville, however, literalizes Avicenna's allegory, or rather his *tanbih*.

ceptual bodily faculties in enabling self-awareness.[37] The thought experiment backfires: in the very process of seeking to ascertain its separation and independence from the body, the pilgrim's rational soul reveals its dependence on the senses, and thus manifests the ineluctably *embodied* condition of the pilgrim's self.[38]

To a certain extent the poem acknowledges this paradox and the radical hylomorphsm it implies. Despite the sustained efforts to disengage the body from the pilgrim's true self or soul, Reason herself also concedes that body and soul appear to be inextricably enmeshed. Both are constitutive parts of the self-divided subject, by turns a spiritual being made in the image of God and a tenaciously embodied, material self:

> [Dieu] te fist, quar esperit es,
> Et te mist ou cors que tu ez. (ll. 5993–94)

[God made you, for you are spirit, and he placed you in the body that you are.]
(p. 81; slightly emended)

The formulation is symptomatic and contradicts the essentially instrumental understanding of the body that Reason attempts to instil in the pilgrim throughout this extended passage: rather than being a soul who has a body, the pilgrim is a subject who is, by turns, soul and/or body.[39] This paradox also introduces the corollary problem of the relation of the intellectual soul to the sensitive soul, the latter generally understood to be the mediating agent for information supplied by the senses and thus more closely associated with the body: yet what is the ontological status of the rational soul in relation to the sensitive soul, and what are their respective roles in cognition? Peter of Spain had already used the Flying Man to address this specific problem,[40] but Peter had been able to argue in favour of the independence of the rational soul precisely because self-awareness was shown to occur in the rational soul alone: his Flying Man remained unaware of his own body and did not rely on any sort of information abstracted from corporeally mediated sense perception.

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[37] This touches on yet another related problem discussed by contemporary scholastics, namely proprioception, or the perception of one's own body, on which see e.g. Yrjönsuuri, 'Perceiving One's Own Body'.

[38] This also contradicts one of the original premises of the Flying Man, namely that the self-aware soul is unaware of his body; see premise no. 2 in Toivanen's schematic rendering of the argumentative structure of the thought experiment, 'The Fate of the Flying Man', p. 68.

[39] A similar point is made by Kay, *The Place of Thought*, pp. 85–87.

[40] Toivanen, 'The Fate of the Flying Man', pp. 75–78.

Debates over the ontological status of the rational soul became particularly controversial in early and mid-fourteenth-century Paris with the rise of philosophical materialism, developing the position originally associated with Alexander of Aphrodisias and transmitted by Averroes. First William of Ockham, and later John Buridan, began exploring the possibility that the rational soul too, like the sensitive soul, was in fact material in origin, suggesting that all forms of human thought accordingly implied a material element — a view that became widespread in the latter half of the fourteenth century.[41] Ockham's comments in the *Questiones Quodlibetales*, dated to 1325–26, provide an uncannily resonant gloss on Deguileville's difficulties, in 1331, in handling the implications of his experiential Flying Man:

> concederet sequens naturalem rationem quod experimur intellectionem in nobis, quae est actus formae corporae et corruptibilis; et diceret consequenter quod talis forma recipitur in forma extensa. Non autem experimur illam intellectionem quae est operatio propria substantiae immaterialis; et ideo per intellectionem non concludimus illam substantiam incorruptibilem esse in nobis tamquam formam.

> [one who follows natural reason would allow that we experience thinking in ourselves as acts of understanding that are the acts of a corporeal and corruptible form; and he would consequently maintain that such acts are received in extended form. However, we do not experience an act of understanding of a sort that is an operation proper to an immaterial substance. And, therefore, we do not, by appealing to acts of understanding, establish that an incorruptible substance exists in us as a form.][42]

Ockham and Buridan stopped short of affirming that the rational soul was a material entity and merely proposed this possibility as the result of a strictly rational approach to the problem — and hence their materialism is of a strictly philosophical order. Yet both Ockham and Buridan also insisted that belief in the immaterial nature of the rational soul could only be held on grounds of faith and revelation, and not reason. In this sense it may be symptomatic that in his second, revised, more defensive and apologetic version of the *Pèlerinage* (1355–56), Deguileville no longer assigns the task of disembodying the pilgrim's soul to Reason, but to Grace (*PVH2*, ll. 6255–6928).

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[41] See King, 'Body and Soul', pp. 512–15; Pasnau, 'Mind and Hylomorphism', pp. 493–95; Zupko, 'John Buridan on the Immateriality of the Intellect'; Pluta, 'How Matter Becomes Mind'.

[42] William of Ockham, *Quodlibeta septem*, i. 10, ed. by Wey, p. 65, ll. 88–94; *Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. by Freddoso and Kelley, p. 58.

Figure 1. Guillaume de Deguileville, *Le Pelerin de Vie Humaine*
[mise en prose de Jean Gallopes] (Lyon: Mathis Husz, 1486), sg. F4ᵛ.

Deguileville's conundrum also crystallizes in a woodcut frequently used in the early printed editions of the *Pèlerinage*, which also points to a series of representational or epistemological problems that weigh heavily on his poetic project as a whole.[43] In the illustration we are shown the pilgrim's soul, depicted as a naked female figure, bending down to take the pulse of the lifeless body. This points to larger representational difficulties: How are we supposed to represent, or indeed visualize or imagine, purely immaterial processes and realities, such as rational soul's self-awareness, or indeed the nature of the rational soul as such? The image reiterates the impossibility of apprehending and representing the rational soul in ways that completely dispense with material, corporeal forms, since indeed the soul is represented as a body.[44] This in turn raises further prob-

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[43] Guillaume de Deguileville, *Le Pelerin de Vie Humaine*, sig. F4ᵛ. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k714551/f87.image.r= le%20pèlerin%20de%20vie%20humaine>.

[44] An illustration in a late thirteenth-century Parisian manuscript of Aristotle's *De anima* similarly (and inevitably) mistranslates Aristotle's teaching into visual terms by representing the

lems concerning the status of Deguileville's Flying Man thought experiment for us as readers, who are the intended final beneficiaries of Reason's teaching on the soul. What status are we expected to attribute to Deguileville's account of Reason's remarkable feat? More specifically, what status can we assign to the mental image we are invited to form, picturing the human rational soul as a substance, an independent entity, a little female figure standing alongside the supine and lifeless body?

In the context of the Western reception of Aristotle, mental images are essentially *phantasmata*, formed by the internal senses of the sensitive soul and ultimately abstracted from sense perception: 'nequaquam sine phantasmate anima intelligit' (the soul never thinks without an image), and 'Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu' (nothing is in the intellect that was not previously in the senses).[45] Even eccentric thinkers like Olivi, who comes close to advocating Augustinian substance dualism in his effort to reject Aristotelian models, concurred that *phantasmata* resided in the sensitive soul and were produced by perceptual processes that humans shared with animals.[46] If the intellectual soul knows itself as a *hoc aliquid* that is immaterial, a separate substance capable of independent cognitive acts without the mediation of the body and sense perception, then by definition this should occur without relying on the services of the sensitive soul and its phantasms. Yet Deguileville's version of the Flying Man thought experiment, by contrast, invites its readers to form a mental image of the disembodied soul, paradoxically represented as a body. In practice, it appears that it is finally impossible for the human mind to imagine, or rather to 'envisage', purely intellectual realities and processes without relying on some form of analogical visualization, ultimately abstracted from sense perception. Inevitably this suggests — against the author's declared intentions — that human cognitive faculties are finally unable to dispose of corporeal *phantasmata*.

Other thinkers were more willing to concede such limitations, notably Aquinas: in expounding the principle of analogy, Aquinas emphasizes the 'remotion', the inevitable rupture between incorporeal substances or realities and bodily phantasms used to gesture towards their existence:

soul as an actual entity or *homunculus*. See BAV, MS Barb. lat. 165, fol. 299ʳ, reproduced and discussed in Tachau, 'Vision as Action and Passion', pp. 339–40 and fig. 1.

[45] Aristotle, *De anima* III. 7, 431a16–17; Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputate de veritate*, q. 2, a. 3 ad 19. See also Cranefield, 'On the Origin of the Phrase, *Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu*'.

[46] See Toivanen, *Perception and the Internal Senses*.

alias etiam incorporeas substantias, in statu praesentis vitæ, cognoscere non possu-
mus nisi per remotionem, vel aliquam comparationem ad corporalia. Et ideo cum
de huiusmodi aliquid intelligimus, necesse habemus converti ad phantasmata cor-
porum, licet ipsorum non sint phantasmata. (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia q. 84, a. 7, ad 3)

[Other incorporeal substances we know, in the present state of life, only by way
of remotion or by some comparison to corporeal things. And, therefore, when we
understand something about these things, we need to turn to phantasms of bodies,
although there are no phantasms of the things themselves.]

But Deguileville seems dissatisfied with mere analogies: rather than emphasiz-
ing the analogical function of his Flying Man — as Avicenna's *tanbih* had done
— he insists on its literal, empirical status, seeking to offer the reader a truth-
ful picture of the rational soul as such, disengaged from its body and existing
as a separate, independent substance. Yet since this procedure invariably relies
on mental and indeed visual images abstracted from sense experience, it only
exacerbates the compenetration of mind and matter, soul and body, immaterial
thought and material phantasm. Whereas the original Flying Man could eas-
ily be used to critique the standard Aristotelian accounts of human cognition
as an exclusively abstractive process, Deguileville's experiential version finally
provides an implicit validation of a whole chain of Aristotelian or Thomistic
propositions he sets out to reject.

This has profound consequences for our appreciation of the logical sta-
tus and epistemological value of the kind of allegorical dream-vision poetry
Deguileville is writing. The mirror of allegory can still serve as an instrument
of self-knowledge, but the 'self' refracted by the *Pèlerinage* is rather different
from the disembodied *imago dei* that Deguileville sets out to affirm or recover.
The pilgrim's self is ineluctably embodied, radically hylomorphic, and remains
unable to transcend its own cognitive limitations by means of thought experi-
ments of any kind. Deguileville is here battling against the limitations of
allegory itself, seeking to transcend its analogical function and attempting to
prove, grasp, and demonstrate instead — with disastrous results. It seems inevi-
table that in his revised, laboriously expanded version of the *Pèlerinage* from
1355–56, Deguileville manifests a far more sceptical and ambivalent attitude
towards his own poetry and allegorical imagery as a whole.[47]

[47] See especially Camille, 'The Iconoclast's Desire'; Maupeu, 'Statut de l'image rhétorique et
de l'image peinte'; Nievergelt, 'From *disputatio* to *predicatio* — and Back Again'.

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# PIERS PLOWMAN AND
# GOD'S THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

Mishtooni Bose

No matter whether one consults the B- or C-text of *Piers Plowman*, the word *experience* appears only once, a fact that contrasts provocatively with its significance as a keyword in some studies of the poem.[1] Thus, in the wake of Anne Middleton's crediting William Langland with nothing less than 'the invention of experience as a literary category', James Simpson has identified 'the discourses of experience and morality' as being fundamental to the poem and describes the vernacular in which such discourses are fashioned as one whose domain is typically that of 'the experiential, the new, the contingent'.[2] More recently, Emily Steiner has interpreted the poem's engagements with logic and rhetoric, intellect and affect as serving the conviction that contraries are 'the ground of experience'.[3] Emphasizing the word's medieval association with the gathering of sensory information, Maggie Ross observes that 'experience is the way self-consciousness interprets the world'.[4] In this context, no less than the metrical choices of the *Gawain*-poet, the crammed alliterative lines of *Piers Plowman* could be described as often insisting on 'the sheer

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[1] Wittig, *Piers Plowman Concordance*, p. 194.

[2] Middleton, 'Narration and the Invention of Experience', p. 161; Simpson, 'Desire and the Scriptural Text', pp. 216, 217.

[3] Steiner, *Reading 'Piers Plowman'*, p. 208.

[4] Ross, 'Behold Not the Cloud of Experience', p. 38.

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impact of phenomena on the consciousness to which they are exposed', thereby furthering the poem's continuous invitation to experiential engagement.[5] Such engagement is also the main theme of this essay, in which I will show how a thought experiment in *Piers Plowman* facilitates critical reflection on a fundamental parallel between its revisionist poetics and its representation of the Incarnation as the manifestation of God's desire to learn about his creation.

Organized as it is around the memories, dreams, and reflections of a first-person narrator confronted by an apparently 'objective order of truth' articulated through the textual voices of *auctoritates*, or the actants of personification allegory, *Piers Plowman* played a distinctive role in a broader development in European literary history whereby the medieval dream vision began to confront the fruitful risks of incertitude attendant upon its assumption of self-validating and self-explicating autonomy.[6] But in responding to the epistemological shift underlying the poem's foregrounding of 'the self as a fictive narrative center for the work', modern critics are of course obliged to evoke *experience* in a frame of reference unavailable to medieval writers.[7] As Ross emphasizes, the word is a semantic shibboleth marking the distance between modern and medieval mentalities.[8] The first three senses listed in the *MED* suggest that in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was still strongly freighted with the sensory connotations that it had inherited, via French, from the Latin *experientia*.[9] Accordingly, it was associated with observation, demonstration, investigation, and experimentation: all senses listed as obsolete in the *OED*.[10] Sense 3 in the *MED* suggests the basis for gradual semantic change from the late fourteenth century, somewhat bearing out Ross's observation that at this time 'the word *experience* began to take on an aura of self-certifying authority'.[11] Although this sense is initially given as 'what is observed or experienced by the senses, sense perceptions', and is thus still closely related to the word's preced-

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[5] Davis, 'Narrative Form and Insight', p. 340.

[6] Middleton, 'Narration and the Invention of Experience', p. 154; Marchello-Nizia, 'La Rhétorique des songes et le songe comme rhétorique', p. 258.

[7] Middleton, 'Narration and the Invention of Experience', p. 161.

[8] Ross, 'Behold Not the Cloud of Experience', pp. 37–39.

[9] *MED*, s.v. *experience*, n. 1a, 1b, and 2; Hamesse, '*Experientia/Experimentum* dans les lexiques médiévaux et dans les textes philosophiques', pp. 83–84; Zeeman, *'Piers Plowman' and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, pp. 166–67.

[10] *OED*, s.v. *experience*, n. 1a, 1b, 2, and 7b.

[11] Ross, 'Behold Not the Cloud of Experience', pp. 37–38.

ing, empirical senses, the *MED* editors resort to pleonasm ('personal or practical experience') in order to denote knowledge acquired directly by individuals. It is as a result of the beginnings of this very gradual change that *experience* and *auctoritee*, knowledge obtained at first- and at second-hand respectively, are drawn into the antonymic relationship familiar to modern critics, as expressed in the opening lines of Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Prologue ('Experience, though noon auctoritee | Were in this world, is right ynogh for me'), which the *MED* cites here.[12] In the *OED*, however, the same lines are cited under sense 4 (a) as an example of the word's most common current sense: 'a state or condition viewed subjectively'. In my view, this is a contestably teleological reading of the Wife's 'experience', which still seems securely aligned with the practical 'esperiment' whereby La Vieille (The Old Woman) in *Le Roman de la rose* acquires her knowledge of love: 'Experimenz m'en ont fet sage | que j'ai hantez tout mon aage' ('Experiments, which I have followed my whole life, have made me wise in love'), a declaration balanced by Phoroneus's earlier pronouncements on marriage, drawing on the supposed authority of all husbands, who 'l'espreuvent | et par experimenz la treuvent' ('test it and find it by experiment').[13] Moreover, in a recent and very rich discussion of the Wife of Bath's 'experience', Derek Pearsall points out that 'ten manuscripts of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* read "experiment" for "experience"'.[14] Nevertheless, in the unrevised *OED* entry at least, the Wife of Bath's declaration is one of the hinges on which *experience* turns as its strictly empirical senses begin slowly to give way to the denotation of subjective authority derived from reflection on directly acquired knowledge.

As this interpretation of the Wife of Bath's declaration shows, an English word that initially denoted experimental processes and their results came gradually to be associated with the fruits of reflection on those results, whence critics' claims that experience, in its modern, subjectivist sense, is closely bound up with *Piers Plowman*'s deepest designs. My purpose here, however, is to show how the word's sole appearance in *Piers Plowman*, in its empirical

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[12] Chaucer, 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue', ll. 1–2, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson, p. 105.

[13] Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. by Lecoy, ll. 12775–76, 8725–26 (equivalent to *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. by Langlois, ll. 12804–05, 8755–56); *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. by Dahlberg, pp. 222, 160.

[14] Pearsall, 'The Wife of Bath's "Experience"', p. 6. I read this essay very late in the evolution of the present one. I am also grateful to Ruth Evans for pointing out to me the significance of the manuscript variants of the Wife of Bath's Prologue in this context.

sense, is no less central to those designs.[15] It occurs in the disputation between the Four Daughters of God (B.xviii/C.xx), which concerns the redemption of humanity, but swiftly expands to encompass the nature of Christ's human experience, thereby addressing one of the poem's fundamental preoccupations. David Aers has long since noted how *Piers Plowman* circles around the compelling notion that 'God became man to learn and experience', but it remains to be shown just how richly *experience* and its Latin counterpart, *experientia*, are bound up with the deeper Christological currents of thought to which the poem made its distinctive contribution.[16] In taking on human nature, precisely what kind of *experientia* might Christ have achieved? My task here is to show how attention to the context in which *experience* makes its unique appearance provokes deeper reflection on the parallels between the poem's Christological preoccupations and its vernacular enterprise. Focusing on Mercy's response to Truth (B.xviii.110–61/C.xx.154–66) and Peace's response to Righteousness (B.xviii.217–24/C.xx.227–38), I will first show how the appearance of *experience* in the setting of a divine thought experiment facilitates a crucial realignment among God's powers.[17] I will link this moment with the disputation's presentation of the Incarnation as an experiential adventure whereby Christ acquires expertise in human suffering. Finally, I will consider how this interpretation of the Incarnation sits alongside the Christologies of selected monastic and scholastic theologians, without the poet's assuming any obligation to mirror their diverse conclusions.

## I

By the time *Piers Plowman* was written, the debate between the Four Daughters of God was an established literary and theological topos, with its origins in patristic exegesis of Psalm 85. 10 (Vulgate, 84. 11): 'Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi; justitia et pax osculatae sunt' ('Mercy and Truth have met

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[15] A suggestive context for this discussion is Zeeman, *'Piers Plowman' and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, pp. 157–200.

[16] Aers, *'Piers Plowman' and Christian Allegory*, p. 108.

[17] Pearsall briefly discusses the first passage in 'The Wife of Bath's "Experience"', p. 9, and much more substantially in an earlier piece, 'The Necessity of Difference', which I read when undertaking the final revision of this essay. I am grateful to the editors of the present volume for drawing my attention to his discussion, which is similar to the present essay in content but dissimilar in its argumentative trajectory.

together; Justice and Peace have kissed one another').[18] Mercy, Truth, Justice, and Peace had long since been interpreted by medieval writers, in Latin and several vernaculars, as female personifications who argue over the fate of humanity. One tradition has them arguing about the creation and another concerns a protest from Satan after the Harrowing of Hell, but the most prolific tradition was concerned with whether or not sinful humanity could, or should, be redeemed.[19] *Piers Plowman* is unique in this tradition because instead of situating the disputation prior to the Annunciation, thereby making the Incarnation the outcome of the debate (as, for example, in the N-Town play *The Parliament of Heaven*), the poem places it at the end of the human life of Christ, with the Daughters disputing instead about the saving of souls from hell, and hence about the Incarnation's ultimate purpose.[20] The poem does, however, observe tradition in having Mercy and Peace support the Redemption, while Truth and Righteousness (the vernacular equivalent of Justitia here) attempt to discredit their arguments.

In the earlier (B) version of the debate, Mercy is concretely imagined as a 'mayde' and a 'benyngne burde', while her sister Truth is 'A ful comely creature [and a clene]', and care is taken to situate them at opposite ends of the dream landscape, with Mercy walking 'Out of the west coste' and looking in the direction of Hell, while Truth walks 'Evene out of the est' and looks westward.[21] The evocation of spatiality, no less than the imagining of God's attributes as embodied actants, brings out the dramatic potential of this encounter, anticipating its later theatrical treatments in French and English. Yet, as Carl Schmidt emphasizes, in *Piers Plowman* the debates between the Daughters take place not on a 'wooden platform' but in 'a theatre of the mind'.[22] Whose mind is this? Several, fictional or otherwise, are engaged in co-creating this scene, most obviously those of the dreamer, the poet, and the poem's successive generations of readers. But as Langland's predecessors were well aware, another mind looms larger

[18] All translations of the Vulgate Bible are from the Douay-Rheims version.

[19] Traver, *The Four Daughters of God*, pp. 5, 7.

[20] On *Piers Plowman*'s distinctiveness in this respect, see Traver, *The Four Daughters of God*, pp. 147, 150, 164–65.

[21] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Schmidt, I, 666, ll. 113–19. Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references are to this parallel-text edition, and I reproduce throughout the square brackets used by Schmidt to indicate readings 'restored from another version [...] reconstructed from extant evidence [...] or wholly conjectural' (II.1, 261). Henceforth line numbers will appear in the main body of the text for ease of reference.

[22] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Schmidt, II.2, 687.

than any of these. Guillaume de Deguileville, the French Cistercian, had also staged elaborate encounters between the Daughters in his influential vernacular allegories *Le Pèlerinage de l'âme* (1355) and *Le Pèlerinage Jhésu Crist* (*PJC*, 1358).[23] In her discussion of Deguileville's situating of the *PJC* version 'at the threshold of dramatization' and of his influence on later French drama, Agnès Le Bouteiller emphasizes that the debate between the Four Daughters takes place within God himself: it is, first and foremost, a 'débat intérieur au cœur de Dieu', or a 'débat contradictoire interne au cœur de Dieu'.[24] Le Bouteiller's comments remind us that the externalizing, embodying, and dramatizing tendencies of medieval allegory should not disrupt our focus on the Daughters as aspects of God's nature as well as actants in their own right. As Schmidt points out, 'the "whole" truth of the divine nature [...] can only be grasped as a harmony eventually realized by the reconciliation of all four sisters'.[25] This comment emphasizes how the eventual rapprochement between the Daughters concludes what has been, from first to last, a divine psychomachia: the playing-out of an internal dispute between different aspects of God's nature as he ruminates on the outcomes for humanity, oscillating between what is right and lawful on the one hand, and what is merciful and peaceful on the other. As J. A. Burrow might put it, both God and Langland are 'thinking in poetry' here.[26] Insofar as this is a drama, therefore, its stage is, first and foremost, the mind of God.

So much, therefore, for the thought: but what, precisely, is its experimental quality? In particular, how might modern understanding of the workings of thought experiments illuminate what happens in the theatre of God's mind? Nancy Nersessian's account of the thought experimenter as someone 'constructing and manipulating a mental model' is particularly relevant here.[27] Understood in such terms, thought experimentation may be 'a highly refined extension of a mundane form of reasoning', but crucially, it takes reasoning beyond the confines of bare logic.[28] Instead, it affords the opportunity of

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[23] Traver, *The Four Daughters of God*, pp. 74–77.

[24] Le Bouteiller, 'Le Procès de Paradis du *Pèlerinage de Jésus-Christ*', pp. 131, 137 ('a controversy within the heart of God'). For the medieval conception of the heart as the site of cognitive functions such as thinking and judging, see *MED*, s.v. *herte*, n. 2 (a) and e.g. Chaucer, 'The Merchant's Tale', l. 1851: 'But God woot what that May thoughte in hir herte' (*The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson, p. 161).

[25] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Schmidt, ii.2, 687–88.

[26] Burrow, 'Thinking in Poetry', p. 14.

[27] Nersessian, 'Thought Experimenting as Mental Modeling', p. 127.

[28] Nersessian, 'Thought Experimenting as Mental Modeling', p. 154.

reasoning through the 'dynamical simulation of entities and processes representing a kind of situation'.[29] A thought experiment is 'presented in the form of a narrative [... that] has the character of a simulation that calls upon the reader/listener to imagine a dynamic scene that unfolds in time [... and] to follow through a sequence of events of processes *as one would in the real world as currently understood*'.[30] Also pertinent here is James Robert Brown's observation that thought experiments are 'like real experiments in that we set things up, let them run, observe the outcome, then try to derive some appropriate conclusion'.[31] To imagine, to visualize, to develop a scenario, to set an argument going, and then to stand back, watching and weighing the outcomes, which are themselves driven by the various known and unalterable qualities of the components involved: all of these cognitive manoeuvres are common to both thought experiments and personification allegories. In their disputations, the Four Daughters have no option but to generate arguments grounded in their respective natures. It is as if God had said: 'What if I allow these four essential components of my nature to dispute the fate of humanity? What conclusion might be generated by having them fight it out?' Crucially, by opting for a process of imaginative modelling, he allows himself to reach a conclusion to which logic alone would not have brought him, but for which a shift towards a different kind of authority is a prerequisite.

As Richard Cross has observed, medieval thinkers 'found the discussion of counterfactual and counterpossible states of affairs to be particularly useful tools for clarifying tricky theological questions'.[32] In this context, therefore, 'imaginative theology', a flourishing literary genre throughout the medieval period, provides further support for my reading of the Daughters' disputations as a thought experiment.[33] Barbara Newman's description of the stylistic and heuristic features of this literary mode brings out the qualities that it shares with epistemically potent thought experiments, and her decision to focus on the rationale for the Incarnation and the salvation of humanity is particularly felicitous in the context of the present discussion.[34] In *Cur Deus homo*, Anselm concedes that 'pulchra' ('beautiful notions'), such as the paradox that Christ's

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[29] Nersessian, 'Thought Experimenting as Mental Modeling', p. 143.

[30] Nersessian, 'Thought Experimenting as Mental Modeling', p. 147 (emphasis original).

[31] Brown, 'Thought Experiments', p. 324.

[32] Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, p. 230.

[33] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 292–305.

[34] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 299.

death restored life, are insufficient to persuade an unbeliever of the necessity of the Incarnation, and he proceeds on the basis that only 'veritatis soliditas rationabilis' ('the logical soundness of the truth') and 'necessitas' (a 'cogent reason') will be adequate for this task.[35] He goes on to describe the fall of humanity through a stylistically austere hypothesis, 'the analogy of a serf who has insulted the honor of his lord'.[36] By contrast, Newman notes, both Robert Grosseteste in *Le Château d'amour* and Langland in *Piers Plowman* present the argument for the salvation of humanity through a scenario that is rhetorically far more elaborate:

> As the serf languishes in prison, they represent the lord's four daughters arguing vehemently about his fate. Thus an abstract conflict between God's justice and mercy is personified [...]. But *in the process, the theology itself subtly alters*, and Anselm's severe lord is humanized in more ways than one.[37]

The disputation between the Four Daughters of God is a literary tour de force that unleashes the heuristic potential of its theological material. Something is transformed through the recasting of a theological question as an imaginative scenario: that is, the revisionist conclusions reached by Mercy and Peace are permitted to prevail over the defensible logic and undoubted authority of Truth and Righteousness. As Elizabeth Kirk puts it, the prospect of Redemption entails God 'doing violence to his own *potentia ordinata*, his self-binding word, his righteousness and truth', something also acknowledged in Hugh of St Victor's version of the debate in his *Annotationes in quosdam Psalmos*, in which Veritas says that the testimony of Misericordia would be contrary to 'what has been ordained'.[38] In addition to setting the agenda for the Redemption itself, therefore, this disputation has additional value in allowing human beings to 'see', and to re-enact in their own imaginations, the mind of God not merely at work but actually in the process of changing. Writing with reference to Deguileville's *PJC*, Le Bouteiller similarly emphasizes that this debate, known in the French tradition as *Le Procès de Paradis*, is a means whereby man gains virtual, imagined access to the thought of God, as well as

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[35] Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus homo*, ed. by Schmitt, pp. 51–52; *Why God Became Man*, trans. by Fairweather, p. 269. On 'beautiful reasons', particularly with reference to the Atonement and Redemption, see Steiner, *Reading 'Piers Plowman'*, pp. 198–210.

[36] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 299.

[37] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 299 (my emphasis).

[38] Kirk, 'Langland's Narrative Christology', p. 27; Traver, *The Four Daughters of God*, p. 15.

becoming the spectator, witness, and ultimately the beneficiary of his inner disputation.[39] For these reasons, the disputation between the Four Daughters can plausibly be understood in terms of a Divine thought experiment. It remains to be seen how God's experiment functions as the engine of change: that is, how it leads to experience.

## II

In B.xviii, the Four Daughters convene at the moment when Christ descends into hell.[40] The first to dispute are Mercy and Truth, the latter marvelling at the appearance of light before hell. Mercy offers a hopeful interpretation of the phenomenon in the form of a brief narrative of the Nativity and of Christ's fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy that 'man shal man save þoruȝ a maydenes helpe' (l. 139), her explication ending with a chiastic flourish: 'And þat was tynt (*lost*) þoruȝ tree, tree shal it wynne' (l. 140).[41] This is very much in the spirit of one of Anselm's 'beautiful notions' from *Cur Deus homo*: 'Et ut diabolus, qui per gustum ligni quem persuasit hominem vicerat, per passionem ligni quam intulit ab homine vinceretur' ('Also [it was appropriate] that the devil, who defeated the man whom he beguiled through the taste of a tree, should himself similarly be defeated by a man through tree-induced suffering which he, the devil, inflicted').[42] Her rhetorical choice might be intended to sound definitive and assured, but Truth hears these lines as 'a tale of waltrot!' (l. 142). Truth responds with the apparently unanswerable claim that 'I, Truþe, woot the soþe (*know the truth*)' (l. 147) — she is, after all, only living up to her name — and a counter-assertion of a paraphrase of Job 7. 9 to the effect that there is no salvation in hell ('Quia in inferno nulla est redempcio', l. 149).[43] Mercy, however, counters Truth's *auctoritas* with a new authority of her own:

[39] Le Bouteiller, 'Le Procès de Paradis du *Pèlerinage de Jésus-Christ*', p. 141: 'l'homme pénètre, en quelque sorte la pensée de Dieu, il devient spectateur, témoin, et surtout bénéficiaire de la décision de la redemption humaine'.

[40] In this section, I discuss the B version on the assumption that it is earlier than C, which at this point does not differ in ways significant to my argument.

[41] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Schmidt, i, 668.

[42] Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus homo*, ed. by Schmitt, p. 51; *Why God Became Man*, trans. by Fairweather, p. 269. For further discussion of this passage, see Steiner, *Reading 'Piers Plowman'*, p. 206.

[43] On the liturgical use of this paraphrase, see Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Schmidt, ii.2, 689.

> 'Thoruʒ experience', quod he[o], 'I hope (*believe*) þei shul be saued.
> For venym ford ooþ (*undoes*) venym, and þat I preue by reson.
> For of alle venymes foulest is þe scorpion;
> May no medicyne [amende] þe place þer (*where*) he styngeþ,
> Til he be deed (*dead*) and do þerto — þe yvel he destruyeþ,
> The firste venymouste, þoruʒ vertu (*power*) of hymselue.
> So shal þis deeth fordo (*undo*) — I dar my lif legge (*stake*) —
> Al þat Deeth dide first þoruʒ the deueles entisyng;
> And riʒt as þoruʒ [gilours] gile (*frauds' deceit*) [bigiled was man formest (*first*)],
> So shal grace þat al bigan make a good ende
> [And bigile the gilour — and that is a good sleighte (*trick*)]:
> *Ars ut artem falleret* (*A stratagem to defraud fraud*). (ll. 151–61)

Although this passage abounds in rhetorical examples of 'a good sleighte', it would seem that Mercy has quickly learned that wordplay by itself is not enough: the logic of her example must be worked through, reconceptualized, indeed almost worn out, so that Truth can be made to understand how, just as the venom from a dead scorpion can be used as an antidote to the poison it inflicted when alive, so this death might undo what Death has already accomplished, however paradoxical that possibility might at first appear. Truth cannot immediately respond to Mercy's arguments because Righteousness and Peace appear on the horizon, and this brief pause in the sequence of disputations permits some much-needed space for reflection on what Mercy has said. For here, after all, is our word: here is *experience*, for which the poem has long waited, much as the salvation that it figures has been long-awaited by humanity.

In the commentary to his most recent edition of the poem, Schmidt asserts that this appearance of *experience* is 'an earlier use [of the word] than any recorded in MED, appealing to what Will has constantly sought as *kynde knowyng*'.[44] I will return to *kynde knowyng* later, but for now it is sufficient to note that Schmidt's observation about *experience* lends extra weight to the argument for its specialness here. Not only is this occurrence of the word unique in each of the longer versions of Langland's poem, but also his use of it may have been precocious and enterprising.[45] Mercy's reinterpretation of an Old

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[44] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Schmidt, II.2, 689.

[45] I follow here the consensual view that an identifiable B-version circulated before 1381 (see for example Hanna, 'The Versions and Revisions of *Piers Plowman*', p. 38). The earliest occurrences noted in the *MED* are from Chaucer (*The House of Fame* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, dated there to *c*. 1380 and *c*. 1385 respectively). Schmidt's point gains added traction if one agrees with Helen Cooper that *The House of Fame* was written after *Troilus* and 'very possi-

Testament prophecy ('man shal man save') in medical terms — that is, with reference to an empirical source of authority — has brought forth a word unprecedented in the poem's lexical universe. A modulation has occurred in God's rumination on the salvation of humanity, whereby Truth's logic and *auctoritas* are displaced by a more directly acquired kind of 'euydence' (the C-text's substitute for 'reson').[46] Schmidt's translation of the B-text ('On the basis of practical experience I [found my] hope that …') and Derek Pearsall's of C ('On evidence from experience, I believe …') are grounded in the justifiable assumption that Mercy's reference to *experience* simply announces the genre of experimental observation to which her *reson* concerning the scorpion's venom belongs.[47] By permitting this shift to the authority of experience, the divine psychomachia, God's thought experiment, has allowed his merciful nature to render him open to reflection in terms to which even Truth cannot give access, just as the Incarnation has already facilitated a shift from theoretical to practical knowledge on God's part. Furthermore, in a singular reading of the expertise to which the Incarnation has already led, and whose fulfillment is close at hand, Peace will soon show precisely how humanity will be saved 'thorugh experience'.[48] I will now consider how Peace's response to Righteousness compares with academic discussions concerning the kind and extent of Christ's human experience, while also keeping its distance from both the constraints and the particular kinds of conceptual nuance fostered in that discursive environment.

## III

In her disputation with Righteousness, Peace's endorsement of Mercy's claims regarding the Redemption offer a reading of the Incarnation as an unprecedented *éducation sentimentale* in which the Incarnate Word will become an expert in human suffering through experimentation with 'contrasts and accumulated experience'.[49] First she seeks to establish the principle that dissimilar

bly late in 1384' (Cooper, 'Chaucerian Poetics', p. 47; see also Cooper, 'The Four Last Things in Dante and Chaucer'). Moreover, the *OED* online (entry profile for 'experience') identifies B.xviii.151 (dated there to 1377) as the earliest use of *experience* in English.

[46] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Pearsall, p. 329.

[47] Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. by Schmidt, p. 224; Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Pearsall, p. 329.

[48] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Schmidt, 11.2, p. 691; Zeeman, *'Piers Plowman' and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, p. 272.

[49] Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, I, 184.

things can provoke knowledge of one another, 'For no wiht woet what wele is, þat neuere wo soffrede' (C.xx.211).[50] This principle had become a philosophical commonplace in both Latin and vernacular literature from Boethius's *De consolatio Philosophiae* to the *Roman de la rose* (in a dissertation on the theme encapsulated in the declaration that 'Ainsinc va des contreres choses | les unes sunt des autres gloses'; 'Thus things go by contraries; one is the gloss of the other') and Chaucer's *Troilus* (in Pandarus's brief outline of the principle that 'By his contrarie is every thyng declared').[51] As Philosophy puts it in Chaucer's rendering of Boethius:

> Dulcior est apium mage labor,
> Si malus ora prius sapor edat.
> Gratius astra nitent ubi Notus
> Desinit imbriferos dare sonos.
> Lucifer ut tenebras pepulerit
> Pulchra dies roseos agit equos.[52]

Hony is the more swete, if mouthes han first tasted savours that ben wykke (*unpleasant*). The sterres (*stars*) schynen more aggreablely whan the wynd Nothus leteth (*ceases*) his plowyngy (*stormy*) blastes; and aftir that Lucifer, the day-sterre, hath chased awey the dirke (*dark*) nyght, the day the fairere ledeth the rosene (*rose-coloured*) hors (*of the sonne*).[53]

Peace develops this argument at length in both versions of the poem, but in the C-text some lines are added (C.xx.216–17) that extend this mode of learning to God himself, and thereby increase the passage's theological density:

Ne hadde (*had not*) God ysoffred (*suffered*) of some oþer (*other*) then hymsulue,
He hadde nat wist witterly where (*known clearly whether*) deth were sour or swete.[54]

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[50] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Schmidt, I, 673. On the influence of this principle in medieval literature and culture, see Barney, *Penn Commentary*, V, 52–53; Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Pearsall, p. 331; Bouchard, *Every Valley Shall Be Exalted*, pp. 1–27; Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*, pp. 11–25.

[51] Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. by Lecoy, ll. 21543–44 (equivalent to *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. by Langlois, ll. 21573–74); *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. by Dahlberg, p. 351; Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, I. 637 (and see also ll. 638–44), in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson, p. 482.

[52] Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. and trans. by Stewart, Rand and Tester, III, m.1, ll. 5–10.

[53] Chaucer, *Boece*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson, p. 421.

[54] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Schmidt, I, 673. Given this increased theological den-

Knowing is not enough: God must be brought to know 'witterly', that is, clearly and in an unmediated form.[55] Having established this principle at some length in both versions, Peace goes on to develop its implications in relation to the Incarnation:

> Forthy (*therefore*) God, of his goednesse, þe furste gome (*man*) Adam,
> Sette hym in solace furste and in souereyne merthe;
> And sethe (*afterwards*) he soffrede (*allowed*) hym to synne, sorwe to fele —
> To wyte (*know*) what wele (*wellbeing*) was ther-thorw, kyndeliche (*directly*) to knowe.
> And aftur, God auntred (*ventured*) hymsulue and toek Adames kynde (*nature*)
> To wyte what he hath soffred in thre sundry places,
> Bothe in heuene and in erthe — and now to helle he thenketh (*intends to go*),
> To wyte what al wo is, that woet (*knew*) of alle ioye:
> *Omnia probate; quod bonum est tenete.*
> So hit shal fare bi (*shall happen to*) this folk: hir folye and here synne
> Shal lere (*teach*) hem what loue is, and lisse (*bliss*) withouten ende.
> For woet no wiht what werre is þer as (*where*) pees regneth,
> Ne what is witterliche (*clearly*) wele til 'wel-a-way' hym teche.
>
>                                              (C.xx.226–37)[56]

The B-text version omits 1 Thessalonians 5. 21 ('But prove all things; hold fast that which is good'), rescued from the hermeneutic misprision that Conscience had earlier imagined for it in B.iii.337–43/C.iii.488–93, and serving as a singularly appropriate injunction for both the Divine and the human conductors of experiments. It is a fitting *auctoritas* for a passage that embraces diverse modes of knowing, both human (pre- and postlapsarian) and divine, and is redolent with examples of learning acquired through discovery (*to fele*, *to wyte*, *kyndeliche to knowe*, *lere*).[57] The verb *witen* ('to know') knits the passage together, appearing anaphorically three times and in a different form in the penultimate line, but particular conceptual pressure is put on *kyndeliche to knowe* ('to have practical experience'), appearing as it does as a flamboyant gloss on *to wyte* ('to know') and thereby emphasizing that the kind of knowledge being acquired is specifically the practical, direct, unmediated kind. Peace's speech is a distinctive theological intervention in which the soteriological purpose of the Incarnation

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sity, I use the C-text throughout this part of the discussion.

[55] *MED*, s.v. *witterli*, adv. 2: 'without obstruction'.

[56] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Schmidt, i, 673, 675.

[57] See Zeeman, *'Piers Plowman' and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, pp. 272–73.

is temporarily sidelined in favour of its experiential dividends, as if God had become man chiefly to learn about emotions at first hand. The plethora of nouns denoting feelings (*solace*, *merthe*, *sorwe*, *wele*, *wo*, *ioye*, *lisse*, *love*) might seem to demand some discussion of medieval views concerning the extent and nature of Christ's human passions.[58] The verbs, however, are mostly concerned with knowledge, and once Peace's focus shifts to God's having *auntred hymself*, the poem has a stake in a long-established set of theological questions concerning the objects and modes of Christ's knowledge in which the concepts of *experientia* and *experimentum* had pivotal significance. I will focus, therefore, not on Christ's suffering or sorrow per se, but on the passage's equally prominent suggestion that the Incarnation resulted from God's desire to learn. A summary of these arguments will elucidate what is at stake in Peace's words, and thereby enable further evaluation of the losses and gains attendant on the poem's engagement with this aspect of medieval Christology.

The history of patristic, monastic, and scholastic discussions of Christ's human knowledge is a long and complex one, and in what follows I focus on those aspects most germane to the present argument.[59] In the third chapter of the *Tractatus de gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* (*The Twelve Steps of Humility and Pride*), St Bernard of Clairvaux gives a slightly different perspective on the issues that are addressed in *Piers Plowman* C.xx.226–37.[60] St Bernard is tackling the claim in Hebrews 5. 8 that the Son of God 'learned obedience by the things which he suffered' ('didicit ex iis, quae passus est, obedientiam'). As the cluster of verb phrases in this chapter shows, there is a sense in which St Bernard shares with Peace the belief that God became incarnate in order 'to wyte', deploying polyptoton as vigorously as Peace amasses her alliterating antonyms. Thus, Christ 'wished His passion, that He might know compassion, His misery that He might know commiseration' ('pati voluit, ut compati sciret; miseri fieri, ut miserere disceret').[61] Christ was open to human suffering 'so that he could learn through personal experience how to be compassionate

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[58] On which see, for example, Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul*.

[59] This phase of my discussion is indebted to the comprehensive accounts of this topic in Ernst, *Die Lehre der hochmittelalterlichen Theologen*; Madigan, 'Did Jesus "Progress in Wisdom"?'; Moloney, *The Knowledge of Christ*; and Murtaugh, *'Piers Plowman' and the Image of God*, pp. 117–21.

[60] Murtaugh, *'Piers Plowman' and the Image of God*, p. 120.

[61] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Tractatus de gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, col. 945. Translation taken from Murtaugh, *'Piers Plowman' and the Image of God*, p. 120, since it is both more idiomatic and closer to the original than Backhouse in this case.

and how to sympathize with those who suffer and are tempted in a similar way' ('ut similiter passis ac tentatis miserere ac compati ipse disceret experimento').[62] Because God 'had no experience of sorrow or subjection he lacked the opportunity of practising either compassion or obedience. In his nature he knew about these things but he had never put them into practice' ('miseriam vel subjectionem expertus non erat, sic misericordiam vel obedientiam non noverat experimento. Sciebat quidem per naturam, non autem sciebat per experientiam').[63] For St Bernard, the distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge allows God's omniscience to coexist with the experiential progress suggested in Hebrews. Crucially, therefore, St Bernard makes it clear that he was 'not saying that this experience increased [Christ's] knowledge in any way, just that it brought him closer to us [...]. This experience [...] did not increase his wisdom, but it increased our confidence in him' ('Quo quidem experimento non dico ut sapientior efficeretur, sed propinquior videretur [...]. Per quam tamen experientiam, non illi [...] scientia, sed nobis fiducia crevit').[64] This distinction is encapsulated with reference to time in the same chapter: 'what He knew from eternity by His Nature *He learned in time by experience*' ('quod natura sciebat ab aeterno, *temporali didicit experimento*').[65] In his human incarnation, therefore, Christ had to submit to the gradual process of learning enforced by temporality. Most significantly for the present argument, the Latin keywords *experimentum* and *experientia* are used to refer interchangeably to the practical aspects of the human knowledge acquired by the Incarnate Word, and both are clearly subordinate to the *scientia* by which St Bernard denotes Christ's Divine wisdom and what he knew *per natura*, 'in his nature'.[66]

Over a century later, scholastic commentators had to strike a similar balance between preserving Christ's beatific omniscience, exploring his assumption of

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[62] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Tractatus de gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, col. 946; *The Twelve Steps of Humility and Pride*, ed. and by Backhouse, p. 26.

[63] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Tractatus de gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, col. 946; *The Twelve Steps of Humility and Pride*, ed. and trans. by Backhouse, pp. 26–27.

[64] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Tractatus de gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, col. 946; *The Twelve Steps of Humility and Pride*, ed. and trans. by Backhouse, pp. 26, 27.

[65] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Tractatus de gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, col. 945. Translation taken from Murtaugh, *'Piers Plowman' and the Image of God*, p. 120. My emphasis in both Latin and translation.

[66] Hamesse notes that until the thirteenth century, most writers on philosophy used the terms interchangeably: '*Experientia/Experimentum* dans les lexiques médiévaux et dans les textes philosophiques', p. 80.

a full human nature, and interpreting several biblical prooftexts claiming that his knowledge somehow increased as a result of the Incarnation. In addition to Hebrews 5. 8, a key text provoking discussion of this issue was Luke 2. 52: 'And Jesus advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and men' ('Et Jesus proficiebat sapientia, et aetate, et gratia apud Deum et homines'). Thirteenth-century mendicant theologians developed alternative Christologies based on their interpretations of this text.[67] A consensus initially developed among commentators such as Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, and St Bonaventure concerning the nature of Christ's progress in experiential knowledge after the Incarnation. Broadly speaking, two issues were at stake: first, the nature of the knowledge available to the Incarnate Word; and secondly, the implications of claims made regarding the psychological powers available to the Word. The first was to prove the less troublesome. A consensus emerged that the Incarnate Word had two kinds of knowledge, one uncreated and divine, the second created and human.[68] The latter kind of knowledge was further subdivided into infused knowledge that was acquired miraculously and acquired knowledge that was produced from the evidence of the senses. No scholastic theologian suggested that Christ progressed in infused knowledge.[69] But a consensus emerged among these and other commentators whereby Christ's progress in acquired knowledge consisted merely of the practical corroboration of what he already knew through infusion.[70] This echoes the conclusion already arrived at by St Bernard, namely that 'Christ's new experience [... did] not really create any new knowledge'.[71] St Bonaventure, for example, concluded that Christ did not increase in his infused knowledge ('secundum cognitionem simplicis notitiae') but did grow in knowledge acquired by the senses ('proficiebat tamen secundum cognitionem experimentalem').[72] It was on such terms that these commentators could accept an increase in *experientia* on the part of the Incarnate Word, while simultaneously excluding any possibility of imperfection in Christ's divine nature.

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[67] On which see Madigan, 'Did Jesus "Progress in Wisdom"?', pp. 186–200, and Moloney, *The Knowledge of Christ*, pp. 53–68.

[68] Madigan, 'Did Jesus "Progress in Wisdom"?', p. 188.

[69] Madigan, 'Did Jesus "Progress in Wisdom"?', pp. 189, 191.

[70] Madigan, 'Did Jesus "Progress in Wisdom"?', p. 191.

[71] Madigan, 'Did Jesus "Progress in Wisdom"?', p. 189.

[72] *In Sent.* iii, d. 14, a.3 q.2, in Bonaventure, *Opera*, ed. by the Fathers of the College of St Bonaventure, iii, 322.

There was, however, one outlier: Thomas Aquinas, whose position regarding the nature of the knowledge acquired by the Incarnate Word underwent a significant shift as he progressed from the commentary on the *Sentences* to the *Summa Theologiae*.[73] In the third part of the *Summa*, he reopened the question, and here the second issue mentioned above, that of the human powers available to the Incarnate Word, comes into play. One of the central tenets of Aristotelian psychology was the claim that human beings possessed an agent intellect, which was responsible for the generation of new knowledge from sensory data.[74] Aquinas's difference from his scholastic predecessors stemmed from a more wholehearted acceptance of the implications of Aristotelian psychology for the understanding of the powers available to the Incarnate Word. He reasoned that if Christ became fully human, he must have had a fully functioning agent intellect, together with its powers of abstracting new knowledge.[75] In the *Summa Theologiae* IIIa, q.12 a.2, Aquinas asks 'Did Christ grow in this experimental knowledge?', with *experimentalis* featuring as an equivalent term to *acquisita* ('acquired').[76] In the reply to this article, he distinguishes between the two kinds of advance in knowledge. An increase in essence is what occurs when 'the habit of knowledge itself increases' ('habitus scientiae augetur'), with *habitus* here denoting a state or condition that could generate new knowledge.[77] The other kind of increase is shown in the effects of this *habitus*, as when someone first demonstrates simple and later more complex matters to others, and in this way Christ certainly grew, for 'with his growth in years he did more significant things' ('secundum augmentum aetatis, opera majora faciebat').[78] Aquinas then breaks with the consensus by attributing a 'habit of acquired knowledge in the soul of Christ' ('in anima Christi habitus aliquis scientiae acquisitae').[79] Were he to subscribe to the consensus, he would still believe that Christ's acquired knowledge only 'increased by experiment ('per experientiam'), that is, 'by the process of translating infused intelligible species into images' ('per conversio-

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[73] Wawrykow, 'Thomas Aquinas and Christology after 1277', pp. 316–17.

[74] Madigan, 'Did Jesus "Progress in Wisdom"?', pp. 192, 195.

[75] Madigan, 'Did Jesus "Progress in Wisdom"?', p. 194.

[76] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. by Walsh, pp. 140–41.

[77] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. by Walsh, pp. 142–43. On *habitus*, see Nederman, 'Nature, Ethics and the Doctrine of "Habitus"'.

[78] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. by Walsh, pp. 142–43.

[79] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. by Walsh, pp. 142–43.

nem specierum intelligibilium inditarum ad phantasmata').[80] But instead he pursues the implications of Aristotelian psychology more fully, stating that in Christ's soul, there was 'a habit of knowledge that could increase as a result of this abstracting of species: the active intellect, having abstracted a first set of intelligible species from the imagination, could then go on to abstract others' ('aliquis habitus scientiae [...] qui per hujusmodi abstractionem specierum potuerit augmentari; ex hoc scilicet quod intellectus agens post primas species intelligibiles abstractas a phantasmatibus, poterat etiam alias abstrahere').[81] Christ could, therefore, actually add to his store of knowledge while incarnate. As Kevin Madigan puts it, 'For Thomas, to state that Christ progressed in knowledge is to affirm that the Word in the hypostatic union took on all that was human: it is to affirm that Christ's humanity was indeed complete and utterly consubstantial with ours'.[82] Likewise, in Liam G. Walsh's words, Aquinas had hereby discovered 'a more credibly human Christ'.[83] But he could only foster this element in his Christological thinking by challenging the view, forged among his predecessors and contemporaries, that any experiential knowledge that Christ acquired while human merely confirmed what he knew through infusion. He remained all but alone among his contemporaries and successors in pursuing this particular interpretation of Aristotelian psychology.[84] Duns Scotus would instead identify Christ's human *experientia* as intuitive cognition, a form of knowledge that 'can only be perfectly had in the presence of its object'.[85] Thus, he writes, 'And by this experience Christ could be said to have learned many things, i.e. by intuitive cognitions, of those things known existentially and through the memories left behind' ('per experientiam dicitur Christus multa didicisse, id est per cognitiones intuitivas (hoc est illorum cognitorum quantum ad exsistentiam) et per memorias derelictas ab eis').[86]

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[80] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. by Walsh, pp. 142–43.

[81] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. by Walsh, pp. 142–43.

[82] Madigan, 'Did Jesus "Progress in Wisdom"?', p. 197.

[83] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. by Walsh, p. 97.

[84] Moloney, *The Knowledge of Christ*, pp. 64, 68 n. 33; Ernst, *Die Lehre der hochmittelalterlichen Theologen*, pp. 254, 301; Torrell, 'S. Thomas d'Aquin et la Science du Christ', p. 399; Wawrykow, 'Thomas Aquinas and Christology after 1277', p. 319.

[85] Cross, *Duns Scotus*, p. 123.

[86] John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, d. 14. q. 3, nn. 7, ed. by Scotus Commission, pp. 470–71; translation taken from Wolter, *The Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus*, p. 117; for further discussion of Christ's intuitive cognition according to Scotus, see pp. 114–17. On what precisely Scotus may have understood by intuitive cognition, see Pasnau, 'Cognition', pp. 296–300.

As even this necessarily brief summary of academic discussions concerning Christ's human knowledge shows, there is much at stake in the apparently uncontroversial claim that God 'became man to learn and experience'.[87] By the end of the thirteenth century, it had become commonplace to describe one aspect of Christ's acquired, human knowledge as *experientia*, but behind the widespread use of this term lay a range of different views concerning the remit of the human psyche that Christ was believed to have assumed. Where, then, does this leave our understanding of the representation of Christ's human experience in *Piers Plowman*? At times, there are powerful affinities between all of the theological sensibilities — monastic, scholastic, and extramural — under consideration here. For example, notwithstanding the very different institutional contexts in which their theologies took shape, both St Bernard and Aquinas can imagine versions of God as an interactive researcher into his creation, as does Langland when he describes how 'creatour wex creature' (B.xvi.215).[88] Daniel Murtaugh evokes Aquinas's foregrounding of the agent intellect when seeking a theological context for the description of how Piers 'parceyued plener tyme | And lered [Jesus] lechecraft' (B.xvi.103–04).[89] In his conclusions to *Summa Theologiae* iiia, q.12, a.2, Aquinas had stated that the active intellect 'does not do everything all at once but step by step' ('non simul totum operatur sed successive'). It follows from this that Christ 'did not know everything from the beginning but gradually and in good time' ('non a principio scivit Omnia, sed paulatim et post aliquod tempus, scilicet in perfecta aetate').[90] Like St Bernard, therefore, Aquinas develops a picture of the incarnate Christ learning gradually, and thus Murtaugh also acknowledges St Bernard's equally compelling account of a God committed to learning and experiencing.[91] For Aquinas, however, the necessary submission to temporal constraints arises because this aspect of Christ's learning was controlled by his agent intellect. Murtaugh sees Piers functioning here as Christ's human nature, specifically as this was manifested through his agent intellect. Thus, he concludes that 'if Christ, because of his human nature, could *acquire* knowledge, we could say, poetically, that He was *taught* by his human nature'.[92] But the means whereby the author of *Piers Plowman* could

[87] Aers, *'Piers Plowman' and Christian Allegory*, p. 108.

[88] Aers, *'Piers Plowman' and Christian Allegory*, p. 108; Kirk, 'Langland's Narrative Christology', pp. 28, 29 n. 14.

[89] Murtaugh, *'Piers Plowman' and the Image of God*, pp. 119–20.

[90] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. by Walsh, pp. 144–45.

[91] Murtaugh, *'Piers Plowman' and the Image of God*, p. 120.

[92] Murtaugh, *'Piers Plowman' and the Image of God*, p. 119 (emphasis original).

have come across theology as distinctive as this is not clear. Rather than postu-
lating any particular source for Langland's conception of Christ's incarnational
experience, therefore, I see the English poem as undertaking a de facto defamil-
iarization of academic Christology by freely constructing different frames of
reference when conducting its own exploration of theological questions.[93] As a
direct consequence of its heuristic poetics, the terms used in *Piers Plowman* to
describe Christ's incarnational learning elude identification with any particu-
lar monastic or scholastic model, and there are gains and losses in the process,
which I will consider in conclusion.

The concept of *kynde knowyng*, briefly mentioned above, provides one exam-
ple of the way in which the poem establishes its own imaginative and concep-
tual ground. Critics have repeatedly emphasized how fundamental this elusive
concept is to the way in which Christ's incarnational experience is imagined, all
the more so because, in keeping with the process of gradual discovery valorized
by the poem, the mirroring of the narrator's desire for *kynde knowyng* by God's
desire *kyndeliche to knowe* takes time to emerge. For Kirk, Christ's incarnation
is the means whereby he acquires *kynde knowyng*.[94] This is in tune with the view
that 'the Incarnation itself is premised on God's desire to know in a "kindly"
manner what Adam suffered and what all sorrow is'.[95] As was noted above,
Scotus arrived at the view that any increase in Christ's human knowledge took
the specific form of an increase in his intuitive cognition, whence the persua-
sive aspects of Britton Harwood's claim that *kynde knowyng* 'resonates with'
and may be a vernacular equivalent of intuitive cognition.[96] In suggesting that
the dreamer continually seeks an object, Christ, that 'gives itself as existing', just
as the resurrected Christ manifested himself to Thomas, Harwood advances a
nuanced and forceful explanation, congruent with the poem's aporetic modes
of procedure, for the dreamer's recurrent and inevitable dissatisfaction.[97] But
this interpretation requires the possibility that *kynde knowyng* may be as sta-
ble a signifier as its putative Latin equivalent, and as Harwood acknowledges,
the author of *Piers Plowman* was not 'a systematic logician, epistemologist, or
semanticist'.[98] Intuitive cognition seems to me an imaginatively and intellectu-

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[93] Pearsall comes to similar conclusions in 'The Necessity of Difference', pp. 161–65.

[94] Kirk, 'Langland's Narrative Christology', p. 35.

[95] Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, I, 181.

[96] Harwood, 'Langland's *Kynde Knowyng* and the Quest for Christ', p. 245.

[97] Harwood, 'Langland's *Kynde Knowyng* and the Quest for Christ', pp. 245–46, 248,
252–53, 255.

[98] Harwood, 'Langland's *Kynde Knowyng* and the Quest for Christ', p. 250.

ally satisfying concept with which to think when one is pondering the kind and range of signification that the term *kynde knowyng* might have at any point in the poem, not least because exploring its possible valency in *Piers Plowman* is one way of addressing the poem's demonstrable concern with directly and indirectly acquired knowledge, whence the often fragmentary forms of knowing that present themselves, episodically and erratically, throughout. But I regard it as equally important that the vernacular term does not require a particular scholastic equivalent to sustain its credibility and inexhaustible charisma, whence the aplomb with which it irrupts into the poem in B.1/C.1 as if always already a term of art in its own right. I would suggest instead that, in keeping with the poem's consistently heuristic temper, it is a mode of knowing that cannot be definitively glossed, and thus safely contained, by a specific term from a prior, mediating discourse. This is how the poem creates meanings distinct from theological frames of reference. From this perspective, unlike the relatively stable scholastic term *notitia intuitiva*, the semi-inscrutable *kynde knowyng* keeps the reader constantly, and indeed reflexively, at the boundary between what can and cannot comfortably be known, its local meanings derived intratextually and contextually, its significance connotative rather than denotative, and 'its tantalizing elusiveness [revealing] its relation to gradual and inevitably inconclusive pursuit of understanding "the true"'.[99] It provides, therefore, a distinctively enactive example of the way in which vernacular texts from this period do not merely 'derive material from an array of Latin systems of thought' but also 'generate their own systems' — or, indeed, sidestep the constraints of systemic thinking altogether.[100]

In the case of Peace's speech, the poem swerves away from, or is simply impervious to, the particular distinctions that had exercised academic theologians concerned with the nature and limits of Christ's human *experientia*. Harwood suggests that for Peace, 'kyndeliche to knowe' something 'is equivalent to "imperfect intuitive cognition", the knowledge of a particular previously known intuitively when that is no longer present'.[101] Thus, Adam may be said to acquire imperfect intuitive cognition of joy 'kyndeliche' by first-hand experience of sorrow. But although Pearsall sees Peace's speech as articulating 'an important (and unusual) positive view of the Incarnation', he is also aware that it might seem 'theologically naïve', eschewing as it does the particular kinds of

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[99] Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, I, 201.

[100] Watson, 'Visions of Inclusion', p. 146.

[101] Harwood, 'Langland's *Kynde Knowyng* and the Quest for Christ', p. 255 n. 65.

complexity that, as we have seen, had exercised academic theologians.[102] For in fact Peace does not acknowledge, still less mediate between, the kinds of academic positions that I summarized above. Specifically, she registers no pressure to insist that Christ's incarnational experience did not lead to an actual increase in his knowledge. Whether out of blissful or even comic ignorance, she rides roughshod over the fine distinctions between simple corroboration of infused knowledge and actual discovery via the senses to which medieval theologians were necessarily attuned. By replacing their nuanced terminology with the philosophical principle that one thing cannot fully be known unless its opposite is directly encountered, she implies that God's knowledge was indeed incomplete until he had acquired a store of incarnational experience. As can now be appreciated, Peace's stance, while certainly risking the charge of naivety, is also energetically untrammelled by academic reservations, or, as Kirk puts it, 'not shortcircuited or constrained by interim conflict with current intellectual idiom' which sacrifices 'experiential understanding' in its quest for 'cerebral lucidity'.[103] She thereby enacts a transference of authority to the heuristic mechanisms of an imagination at liberty to reorder the academic hierarchy of knowledge, prioritizing instead the desire for discovery depicted by Peace as the motivation for the Incarnation. And thus the poem clears the way for experiential understanding to occupy its foreground. For God, 'to know and to believe kindly, then, is to know by the framework of experience, especially by trial of opposites and contrasts'.[104] And it is this principle that has similarly been endorsed in God's ruminations. Thought experimentation creates the conditions for a crucial realignment among his powers, to whom he has devolved the right to invert the hierarchy of learned discourses. The full implications of this inversion are previewed in Mercy's use of *experience* as her authority and brought to fruition in Peace's reflexive presentation of the Incarnation as an experiential adventure to which the poem, in its revisionist experimentalism, is synecdochically related. Time, patience, and reflection, the raw materials of 'gradual and unending experience', are as important for the poem's narrator and its readers as they are for the incarnate Christ whom its narrative brings gradu-

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[102] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Pearsall, p. 331. I am not persuaded by Kirk's brief recourse to an ancient heresy, Patripassianism (the belief that God felt human passions) as a means of arguing that Peace's words are 'heterodox' ('Langland's Narrative Christology', pp. 29, 34).

[103] Kirk, 'Langland's Narrative Christology', p. 30.

[104] Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, I, 182.

ally into focus.[105] Thus, one aspect of the poem's improvisational Christology mirrors the arduous readerly process that it fosters. Peace's emphasis on knowledge through the encountering of opposites imagines creation being defamiliarized for the Creator as so much of the poem's catechetical, doctrinal, and homiletic material constantly is for its narrator and readers. Kirk sees the poet of B.xviii as combining his diverse materials in 'a *heuristic* process, one that permits him to discover, remember, and create a solution to something he cannot grasp experientially in any other way'.[106] As this observation suggests, critics have not been impervious to the fact that the immersive, experiential adventure of Christ's incarnation is both a metaphor and a precedent for what *Piers Plowman* required of its creator and continues to require of its readers. I have sought here to show just how precisely the author of *Piers Plowman* may have understood that aspect of his poem.

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[105] Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, i, 181.

[106] Kirk, 'Langland's Narrative Christology', pp. 31–32.

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# The Conception of the World in *Placides e Timéo*

Alice Lamy

## *Introduction*

The present essay will discuss the anonymous prose work *Placides e Timéo, ou Li secrés as philosophes*, probably written at the end of the thirteenth century. This dialogue between Timéo, the master of philosophy, and his young princely disciple, Placides, deals with divine principles of cosmology and the creation of the world and the arguments that the philosophers use to think about and explain them. The dialogue has rarely been studied since its edition and commentary by Claude Thomasset, published in 1980 and 1982 respectively, perhaps because it is seen as a minor work, composed in the vernacular, whose mixed and tortuous style cobbles together didactic tropes, fables, and anecdotal stories along with theoretical and philosophical disquisitions.[1] The mixing together and development of fiction and natural philosophy testi-

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I would like to offer Jonathan Morton my sincerest thanks for all his valuable intellectual feedback and linguistic corrections. This paper could have not been published without his considerable help.

[1] According to Thomasset, *Une vision du monde au XIIIᵉ siècle*, the dialogue offers two different thematic perspectives. The first involves anecdotes and exemplary narratives including but not limited to scripture (such the parable of the sower, the episode of the tower of Babel, the story of Amphiteus and the child, and the fable of the crafty crow), which support the dialogue's philosophical cosmology (p. 11). The second aspect of the work involves a description of the

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fies to the desire to combine all aspects of knowledge and truth typical of this period, but the framework is weak and shows a lack of mastery of the major contemporary philosophical debates at the University of Paris.

The work was probably composed *c.* 1304 by a Parisian author who, despite not being highly educated and not having taken the scholastic path to becoming a master of arts or a theologian, casts himself as the heir of earlier *magistri*. He belongs, however, to a modest, well-designated social group, close to the clerical sphere; he may have been in contact with Jean de Meun, with whom he shares a willingness to understand the roots of social inequality, a critical distance from religion and the aristocracy, and the idea that scholars should be seen as worthier than princes or kings. This compilation could be seen to hold the ambition to use knowledge for political purposes.[2]

The dialogue references a wide range of scientific works starting with Alexander's letter to Aristotle and is evidence of the author's knowledge of lots of sources from Antiquity, such as Seneca and his *Questiones naturales*, Macrobius's *Saturnalia*, and Ovid's poetry, as well as the medieval theories of William of Conches, Honorius of Autun, William of Auvergne, and authors from the Arabic world, such as Avicenna and even Maïmonides. The dialogue presents itself, then, as an excellent tool for conveying the range of textual knowledge available in the thirteenth century; it offers a collection of many authors far more than it tries to test an intellectual authority against observed reality. Thomasset has identified lots of hidden philosophical, biblical, and patristic sources and quotations in the text underpinning many of *Placide e Timéo*'s cosmological and metaphysical assertions, including Aristotle, Seneca, Isidorus, Honorius of Autun, Bernardus Silvestris, Avicenna, Gundissalinus, Maïmonides, Vincent of Beauvais, and Gossuin of Metz. There are comparisons to be made in the text's purpose with *Le livre de Sydrak* or the tradition of Honorius's *Elucidarium*.[3]

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world, encompassing God, the mirror of eternity, God's creatures, heavenly bodies, the angels, the elements, the sun and the luminosity of elements, and visual phenomena.

[2] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, pp. lxxxiv–lxxxv. At the beginning of the dialogue, Timéo has specially selected the young Placides for instruction over the son of the emperor, despite his lower status as the son of a secondary king, because of his strong enthusiasm for learning, which carries the trace of a polemic about the relationship between social status and education.

[3] Thomasset, *Une vision du monde au XIIIe siècle*, pp. 48–82. See also Dronke, *Latin and Vernacular Poets of the Middle Ages*; Dronke, *The Medieval Poet and his World*; Franklin-Brown,

The aristocratic readership of *Placides e Timéo*, a non-philosophical audience, is probably quite exclusive and comes from a secular environment; the dialogue survives in seven French manuscripts, often bound with a Chartrian corpus of philosophical texts including Boethius's *De consolatio Philosophiae* and the cosmological literature of the *Imago mundi*. As Thomasset's introduction suggests, the work seems therefore to be well known by a few readers on the fringes of university.

The author has produced a kind of cosmological fresco which, for all its erudite philosophical references, does not share the same encyclopaedic organizing principle as Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum*: the approach is not intended to encapsulate the entire range of human knowledge about the universe. Instead, the dialogue focuses on the physical and metaphysical mysteries of natural generation and the divine creation of terrestrial and celestial beings, about which human knowledge will be very limited anyway. It does not matter whether the development and the reasoning are not rigorous enough, whether Timéo and his follower are following the same intellectual path: the crucial and only point is for humans to try to understand the enigmatic world as far as possible, since they will not get definitive answers about the transcendent divine project.

The choice of a fictional dialogue may imply that philosophical speculation about God and his activities is not the right way to proceed and in contrast offers a frame within which ideas can be tested. However strong Timéo's teaching is for Placides, acts of divine creation cannot be objects of speculation and experimentation. However, although these mysteries cannot be tested, they can be experienced in a poetic and mystical way: Timéo advises Placides to admire, observe, and appreciate the effects of creation. Despite warning his disciple against the misleading nature of the senses, he finally invites him, albeit implicitly, to abandon pure speculation and experimentation in order to seek an affective and aesthetic experience.

As a consequence, this fictive text issues a challenge to philosophical and cosmological authorities, by suggesting the possibility of surpassing sensual experience and rational knowledge, exchanging them for a more fruitful experience, poetical, imaginative, and theological in which the divine act of creation itself becomes the spiritual and methodological model of thinking the world. Moving from experiment to experience, this process leads humans, through

*Reading the World*; Lamy, 'La Volonté didactique de Bernard Silvestre dans la *Cosmographia*'; Ribémont, *De natura rerum*; Silvi, *Science médiévale et vérité*; and Stock, *Myth and Science in the 12th Century*.

digressions and movements of thought, from speculation to imagination and marvel. It is a process that helps humans to return to the state of creatures admiring their creator. First, because God, through creation, offers us light, and the vision of many natural *phenomena*: therefore, the experience of our piety, of our life on earth, suggests the possibility of understanding the conception of the world and its secrets by means of our senses. Second, because God's creation takes place through the division of an original indivisible Whole, and understanding this division makes available a metaphysical and logical method for finding and rediscovering the secret order of everything that we desire to know and to name. This fictional dialogue in the vernacular explores the analogues and symmetries authorized by God between his creation and human understanding. The vernacular dialogue challenges the dominant philosophical *ratio* of the schools, which reigns supreme in contemporary Latin academic works, produced in universities.

Following these two divine aspects of creation, the first part of this essay will discuss the importance of divine light as the foundation of human speculation, especially in how it relates to vision. I will take the more particular example of bodies, their composition, their perception, and their place and movement in this theology of creation. Why bodies? Both because they are the elements that make up natural beings, and because the difference between heavenly substances and those of the earth is understood in relation to corporeality and place.

The second part will show that in our effort to understand the organization of the world divided by God, language and the work of naming things and determining their origin with etymology are very important. These intellective and logical processes of speculation must be sustained by imagination which depends on the intellective faculties: human beings desire to know the truth about the created world, but divine secrets are hardly reachable. The imagination, then, simultaneously reminds human beings of their intellectual limits and offers a path towards knowledge through something other than speculation. Through the knowledge of one's own limits, the limits of one's knowledge can produce an affective experience as well as an intellective one, a poetic and imaginative epistemological experience.

The dialogue between Placides and Timéo is less concerned with the natural world itself than it is with the limitations of the knowing subject. Timéo sets out situations that can be categorized as thought experiments, peppered with parables and anecdotes, but these do not lead to the observation of physical phenomena in hypothetical conditions — the supposed aim — as much as they do to the experience of thinking itself, to the desire to know that is proper to human nature. Timéo offers Placides particular paths to knowledge for which

the difficulties experienced in thinking testify to the impossibility of mastering the material conveyed through thought experiments, even for the most studious of philosophers.

In this work, the imaginary has to do with the demonstrative, insofar as the thought experiment as hypothetical scenario exposes the fact that the created world's reality surpasses the limits of rational, logical human thought. Timéo's concrete-scenario thought experiments attract Placides and depend on his imagination, but through the generation of images in his disciple's mind, Timéo's use of fictions in describing creation in a more convincing and affective way reveals the poverty of human tools for thought. The imagined thought experiment is a necessary precondition not only for any physical experiment but also for the extension of knowledge beyond the realms of logical deduction.

## Divine Light's Importance for Human Understanding and Speculation

### Divine Light and Divine Mirror: The Original Sources of Vision and Speculation

In the dialogue Timéo praises the divine light that makes human perception possible along with knowledge, with which it is closely connected.

'Ha, maistres', ce dist Placides, 'vous m'avés dit que c'est miroirs de perdurableté,[4] qui luist en toutes coses et toutes coses sont en lui, donques nous voit il et nous lui'.

'Voirs est', ce dist Timéo, 'qu'il est miroirs de perdurableté; [...] Il reluit en tout car il voit tout et connoist et set [...] et, sans se lueur [= sa veue = sa saveur],[5] nous ne poons riens, ains nous convient sentir se lueur en ce que il nous fait aler et parler. [...] A la lueur e enluminement du jour ou de le clarté, nous y poons veoir nos figures [...]. Ossi tant comme Dieus nous enlumine et il veult en nous mettre clarté et se haute vertu, qui est droite enluminance, tant poons nous aler et parler et sentir, et sans lui non'.

['Well, master', said Placides, 'you told me that he is the mirror of eternity which shines in everything and everything is in him, so God sees us and we see him'.

'It is true', said Timéo, 'that God is the mirror of eternity; [...] he gleams in everything because he sees everything and knows and has knowledge, [...] and without

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[4] Cf. 'mirouer pardurable' which means God in the *Roman de la rose* (v. 17438, ed. by Lecoy), this may be proof that the author of this text has read the *Roman de la rose*.

[5] These are two MS variants.

his light, we cannot do anything. On the contrary, we are allowed to feel his light because he ensures that we can move and speak. [...] In the daylight and in the brightness of the day or in the light, we can see our forms. [...] As long as God illuminates us and wants to fill us with light and his high virtue, which is correct illumination, we can go and speak and feel, and without him, we are unable to'.][6]

The use of perceptual verbs is significant because, in accordance with the Augustinian tradition,[7] they reveal the importance of the root meaning of 'speculation'. God offers humans the opportunity to discover him through the mirror (*speculum*) that replicates the images of things he created. Human speculation deals with the observation and the contemplation of a prodigious world whose brightness reflects the divine activity of creation and in which humans desire experience. Therefore, divine light allows humans to see the world, to know it. We sense light (vision) and speech (hearing), and God also gives sight in order to increase faith. Speculation follows a Christian and Platonic process,[8] which allows humans to discover the reality of the exemplary word through the reflected one, moving from sensual to affective experience.

Through the power of God and through faith, natural beings' experience can be frames within which ideas can be tested, that is to say, can be lived through the divine mirror, like a mystical experience. We have to remember that the dialogue is influenced in its divine representation by mystical experiences. Thomasset remarks that every time the subject of the mirror is used in the text, human beings are always described as close to God.

To know the world is to see creatures, but also to ascend to divine heights. Human beings must use their senses but at the same time try to see inside the divine project by sensing the invisible world of archetypal ideas. In many manuscripts, the editor has remarked that the word 'saveur' (taste) stands for 'veue' (sight) of God.[9] In *Placides e Timéo*, through the vision and the taste of God,

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[6] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 34 (p. 15). See also p. 41: 'yeuls d'omme ne peuent veoir sans clarté' (human eyes cannot see without light). Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the text are mine.

[7] ii Corinthians 3. 18, 13. 12; Augustine, *De trinitate*, xv. 8: '*Speculantes* dixit, per speculum videntes, non de specula prospicientes.'

[8] This kind of speculation implies a Platonic theory of a world of exemplars. Sensitive things are in a kind of material area, of which they are made and in which they are located. The demiurge models it, fixing his eyes on intelligible forms, which maintain order, stability, and permanency in the world (*Timeus*, 35a–b). See Calcidius, *Commentaire au 'Timée' de Platon*, ed. by Bakhouche, 165, ll. 10–29; Brisson and Meyerstein, *Inventer l'univers*.

[9] The author may relate to the link between *sapientia* and *sapor* that pseudo-Augustine

we see and taste the universe; all our senses are aware of the secrets we have to explore, and they measure the immensity of our desire to know and understand the world. The vernacular of the dialogue may provide new ways to express the various pathways of thought and to convey the meanings both of 'experiment', which uses senses in order to exceed them and to attain *scientia*, and of 'experience', which reveals the unreachable beauty of the world and the divine project.

At three different places in the dialogue, we find discussions that deal with divine light, the sun and the moon, the sun and light, and vision, and these discussions mark the division between the text's main sections: (1) God's creation; (2) angels and elements, the difference between bodies and souls, what is corporeal, what is incorporeal; and (3) animals and human beings. Let us take the example of bodies as they relate to sound and vision.

## Speculation and the Senses: The Sound and Sight of Bodies

Bodies occupy a central place in the definition of speculation in the dialogue, and every time that Timéo tries to describe the foundations of the universe he does so through use of the senses, especially when he explains the importance of the elements (water, earth, air, fire), demonstrating their corporeality and how they compose all terrestrial creatures.

The theory of elements, as found in the cathedral schools and in Constantinus Africanus, represents a significant portion of our anonymous author's cosmological knowledge. This issue regularly astonishes the young Placides:

> 'Maistres, pour Dieu', dist Placides, 'vous qui parlés de corps, car me dites que est corps'.

> 'Biaus fieuls, volentiers. Corps si est toute cose qui peut soustenir et qui peut emplir vaissel et toute cose que, quant elle hurte contre l'autre, fait son'.[10]

> ['Master, in the name of God', said Placides, 'you who speak about bodies, now tell me what bodies are'.

> 'Gladly, sweet child. A body is any thing which can support and fill a container and any thing which, when it collides against another, produces sound'.]

In answer to Placides's questions about bodies, Timéo does not immediately present any theoretical explanations, and after digressions — such as the fable

makes in *De spiritu et anima*, col. 786: 'Sapientia namque est amor boni sive sapor boni, a sapore siquidem dicitur'.

[10] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 77–78 (p. 32).

of the crafty crow — and other anecdotal narratives, he remembers and develops the phenomena about bodies described by Aristotle, using examples and experiments:

> Je vous ay dit: qui deux corps hurte l'un a l'autre, ilz font son. Et se vous le volés savoir, prenés une vergue en vostre main et le demenés roidement en l'air, li airs sonnera et c'est pour ce que le vergue le trenche et hurte l'un contre l'autre, et pour ce en ist li sons, car autrement n'istroit il mie, donques pert il que li airs a corps.[11]

> [As I said to you, if two bodies collide against each other, they produce sound. And if you want to know this, take a cane in your hand and shake it quickly in the air. The air will sound because the cane slices it and because each collides against each other. That is the reason why there is sound, because otherwise, it would never be produced and so it is clear that air has a body.]

According to Timéo, bodies are related to sound: bodies produce a sound when they hit each other, and so one object on its own cannot produce sound.[12] Quoting the naturalist position of Aristotle, he says that bodies occupy a specific place relative to each other, which underlines their original place in the universe.[13] As Timéo teaches Placides, he constantly brings together experience and knowledge, experience being the first epistemological step towards theoretical knowledge, although the facts of direct observation must be always closely investigated. This statement about bodies and sound is made at four different times (paragraphs 80, 89, 101, 102).

Then Timéo recalls the Aristotelian law of the impenetrability of two bodies from the *Physics* iv. 9, according to which every three-dimensional extension must have its own place, and gives more and more Aristotelian examples. His aim is to support the idea that nature does not admit a vacuum, that divine creation consists of four main elements which offer a perfect continuity between every created thing, and that these elements are perfectly complementary to give existence and consistency to all existent things:

> Et pour ce dist Aristotle que rien n'est vuist et que toutes coses sont plaines ou de terre ou d'iaue ou de fu ou d'air.[14]

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[11] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 88–89 (pp. 36–37).

[12] Aristotle, *De anima*, ii, 8 (419b): 'yet the sound in act which occurs is always the action of something else, compared with something and within something: it's an impact to a body part which produces sound. It's therefore impossible that a single body produces a sound'.

[13] Aristotle discusses the movement of heavy and light bodies in *De caelo* i, 2.

[14] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 89.

[And that is why Aristotle says that nothing is empty and that all things are full of earth or water or fire or air.]

The notion of place (*locus*) as described by Aristotle in *Physics*, IV is very important at this period in the University of Paris, the idea of place being used to imply a creation under divine control, with a natural and metaphysical origin for every being, from which beings go and to which they return.[15] Bodies therefore can become the symbols of the fact that in creation, everything has an order and is included in the *ornamentum* of the universe, nothing is wrong, nothing is lacking, and nothing has been forgotten.

Second, bodies are related to vision: the discussion about vision (paragraphs 188–204) is developed by Timéo just after having established that elements are dark in themselves (although of course such an assertion is problematic in relation to fire).

In paragraph 187, which takes up again the first developments of the dialogue about the importance of the sun, Timéo asserts:

> Sachiés que nulle cose n'a clarté de lui mesmes, fors que le solail, ains sont tenebres en terre, en yaue et en airs et en fu, fors que tant que le solail en y met de se naturelle clarté.

> [Know that nothing has light in itself, excepted the sun, so things are dark in earth, water, air, and fire unless the sun put its natural brightness in them.]

Placides himself pays attention to the Aristotelian examples given by Timéo (such as that of birds flying in the air), and his speculative relation with his master is always founded in verbs of perception: listening is learning; supposing and seeing are regularly connected. When the prince does not understand how the air should be a body, he exclaims:

> Coment, maistre? Je voy que les oisiaus vont parmi l'air sans achouper [...] et si les veons nous bien. Et se li airs eust corps, il m'est avis qu'il se hurtassent et que le corps de l'air nous tausit leur veue. Si vous pri que vous le m'enseigniés.[16]

> [What did you say, master? I see that birds fly into the air without colliding [...] and we see them very well. If air had a body, it seems to me that they would have crashed into each other and that the body of the air would be visible here to us. Please, teach me about this.]

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[15] Aristotle, *Physics*, IV, 9 (209a 5–8).

[16] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 77–78 (p. 32). Placides has a similar reaction when questioning the elements as bodies with a soul in the discussion of water's bodily aspect. 'See' can be found in paragraph 103 (p. 43).

Placides wants further details about bodies, and he tries to clarify the teaching of Timéo through direct observation. Placides always trusts his initial observations, and Timéo therefore reminds him of the potential for the senses to be deceived, going further into notions and phenomena that require experiments as described by Aristotle and that require the more mystical vision and light offered to us by God. Timéo (whose name may recall the *Timaeus*) on some level stands for the imperative of seeing below the surface to understand hidden meanings, in both Aristotelian and Platonic perspectives on the world.

Speculation through the senses (used in accordance with God and Aristotle) is thus the foundation of Placides and Timéo's methodological relation. This kind of sensitive speculation is the result of two complementary representations of the world. The first is an Aristotelian naturalist account of knowledge that gives a place for experiments or the empirical, although only very simple examples relating to sensation are given. Second, this naturalism allows speculators to understand further and to explore the divinely conceived world in a more mystical way than is possible through experience alone. Therefore, we could relate the idea of experiments in this dialogue to the observation of natural phenomena, while that of experience evokes a more mystical representation of natural life willed and ordered by God, between the appearance presented to the senses and the secrets of the divine laws of that universe that can be seen thanks to the regularity of material phenomena.

This approach is not very far from the aims of Aquinas, who linked revealed doctrine with the philosophy of the Stagirite,[17] representing the interplay between reason and sense perception in understanding creation according to the more philosophical and Latinate methodology of the university.

## The Importance of the Divine Act of Division and the *Affective Process of Desiring and Naming the Created World*

### 'Diviser' and 'Deviser': The Intellective Origin of the Imaginative Foundation of Speculation

Speculation and the study of the world take their logic from the divine act of division, which ordered all creatures who were originally indivisible, unified in the mind of God. God does not need speculation because for him there is no duality between subject and object, between him and his creation with a

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[17] Marrone, *The Light of thy Countenance*; Mazzarella, 'Aristotelismo, Platonismo, Neoplatonismo'.

divine inseparability between cause and effects. However, the Creator provides humans with a *speculum* through which several kinds of knowledge will be possible. Human speculation implies an enthusiastic subject looking at the reflected and enigmatic object that is creation.

According to Timéo, 'Dieus a tout en soy et avoit, quant tout estoit ensamble' (God has everything within himself and had all in him, when all was together),[18] and he goes on to say that 'ainsi sont les coses ordonnees par le hautesche du createur, qui sagement les desmerla' (all things are thus ordered by the greatness of the Creator, who wisely separated them).[19]

The master specifies the four substances from which all living substances are made in the sublunary sphere,[20] and he clarifies the order of created beings, from those which are the most spiritual to those which are the most material: sun, moon, angels, stars, elements, bodies. (and here the frequent occurrence of the term 'division' is worthy of note).[21]

> 'Biaus douls maistres', dist Placides, 'dites moy comment les creatures soubs Dieu furent divisees'.
>
> 'Volentiers', dist Timéo. 'Placides', dist Timéo, 'le sire de tous les seigneurs si fit division de toutes les coses. [...] Et par maintes divisions fit ces lieus et mist creatures'.[22]
>
> ['My dear master', said Placides, 'tell me how creatures under God were divided'.
>
> 'Gladly', said Timéo. 'Placides', said Timéo, 'the Lord of all the Lords divided all the things. [...] And through many divisions, he made these places and put creatures in them'.]

This principle echoes the philosophers' methods of thinking about beings: Aristotle and Porphyry are Timéo's philosophical sources for his teaching about how bodies and creatures are classified. Timéo quotes Aristotle in paragraph 66 and then paragraph 74 and, ten paragraphs later, he refers to Porphyry to explain the logical distinction between substance and accident. On the basis of this distinction between substance and accident, Timéo begins to establish the classification of bodies and their places.

Speculation about bodies is therefore very important in this dialogue, because they are studied through both methodologies for accessing the divine

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[18] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 37 (p. 16), 50 (p. 21).

[19] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 65 (p. 26).

[20] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 50 (p. 21).

[21] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, pp. 21, 26, 28, 31.

[22] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 49 (p. 20).

senses: through the use of sound and vision, as we saw earlier, and through classification, that is, divisions between corporeal bodies that have a place and incorporeal ones without place, between those with souls and those without:

> Il est une substance qui a corps et l'autre qui n'en a point. Celle qui a corps si est aussi que les elemens et les coses qui des elemens sont fourmees. [...] L'autre substance qui n'a point de corps si est comme poetés du chiel, les esperis, les ames [...] car qui n'a corps, il ne peut nul lieu tenir ne pourprendre.[23]

> [One kind of substance has a body and the other does not. Among the kind with a body are elements and things which are shaped from elements. [...] Substances without bodies include celestial powers, minds, and souls [...] because that which has no body cannot have or occupy any place.]

Place serves as a criterion by which to distinguish between high creatures and low creatures, one very often discussed and studied throughout the thirteenth century by philosophers in angelology: Are angels and spirits corporeal or not? How can they move, considering that God put them in charge of operating the world?[24]

The idea of division enables Timéo to explain the world, but division is immediately made to chime with the Old French term 'deviser' (to describe):

> Tous li mondes, ce dist Aristote — et il doit voir —, si n'est qu'en II coses; et ces coses sont devisees en maintes parties par desous, mais toutes sont soubs ces II. L'une est apelee substance et l'autre si est apelee accident.[25]

> [The whole, said Aristotle truthfully, consists in only two things and these things are divided in many parts below, but all of them fall under these two things. One is called substance and the other, accident.]

> Substance si est devisee [= division] en maintes mennieres: il est une substance qui a corps et l'autre qui n'en a point.[26]

> [Substance is divided in many ways: one kind of substance which has a body and the other does not.]

> Pour ce que ceste cose peut estre, si comme je vous ay devisee [= description], pour plus legierement entendre, il fu uns philosophes, qui fu apelés Porphires; il fist

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[23] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 68–69 (p. 28).

[24] Lamy, 'Le Théorie du lieu selon Alexandre de Halès', pp. 3–11.

[25] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 66 (p. 27), 50 (p. 20).

[26] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 68 (p. 28).

en son livre un figure qui est nommee li arbres de Porphire [...] — est devisés li mondes sous Dieu en II manieres, en substance et en accident.[27]

[So that this thing can be, like I told you, in order to understand easier, there was a philosopher called Porphyry; in his book he made a figure which is called Porphyry's tree [...] the universe is divided [and described] in two ways: substance and accident.]

*Devisare* comes from *Divisare*, 'to divide, to share'; as the Middle Ages progresses, *divisare* supplants *devisare* but preserves the meaning of describing, indicating, fixing, telling a fictional narrative as well. So, in the dialogue, the emergence of the term 'deviser', deeply rooted in fiction, appears at the same time as philosophical classification: the division of substances and the narrative story of the divine creation are closely linked to the cosmological secrets of the universe. When Timéo says that 'substance si est devisee en maintes mennieres', it means that substance is subject to division but has several meanings too and is destined for philosophical explanation and the narrative process as well.

Timéo explains the world to Placides, but he also tells the story of creation, as if these two actions of teaching were necessary for establishing truth, and as if these *deviser* and *diviser* are simultaneously necessary for the intellective and imaginative processes of speculation. Imagination is a very serious way to speculate about divine secrets: let us note, moreover, that the secrets conveyed in the dialogue are of both the mystical, spiritual, and divine kind and the rational and philosophical. Imagination makes it possible to negotiate creation, to penetrate the meanings of divine division. Understanding the world means acknowledging that much of it is incomprehensible. Imagination then becomes a precious tool in order be able to accept these secrets, as the human mind must try to see mystery that exceeds its own philosophical reason. Let us now make three remarks to try to understand how Timéo translates these secrets about the created world from an intellective *division* to an imaginative narrative (*devisee*), and why imagination is so important for acts of speculation.

## The Power of Words to Evoke the World

Etymology takes a front seat in describing the conception of the world: Timéo resorts to etymology just as much as to observation. Each must reveal, in its own way, the divine cosmological act, through significant words and experiments. At this period in the history of thought, it seemed impossible that the matter of

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[27] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 76 (p. 31).

the sensible world itself could reveal any trace of knowledge. However, describing, narrating, and classifying the world is the only way to approach models of knowledge, however tentatively (and this both from Platonic and Aristotelian perspectives).[28]

In the first instance, etymology depends on language and imagination:

> Le terre qui est element si est le terre qui est dessous, qui premierement fut nommee 'arida', si comme nous avons dit. Et aucun des philosophes dient que elle fu apelee 'solum', si fu dit de 'solidum'; 'solidum' si vaut autant a dire comme ferme.[29]

> [The earth which is an element is the earth below, and it was first named 'arida', as we said. But some of philosophers say that it was called 'solum', and so it was called 'solidum'; 'solidum' means the same as firm.]

A thing's name is the adequate representation of the thing that it denotes. Etymology, whose heuristic and epistemological tradition goes back to Isidore, relates to physical reality too; it establishes a correspondence between a thing's name, function, and reality, independently of direct observation. From this perspective, etymology is a kind of intellective imagination: Timéo names the world and therefore it exists in our intellective mind, but in our imaginative mind too. The master explains the etymology of elements:

> Et aucuns dient qu'il sont elemens de 'elion' qui vaut autant a dire comme Dieus, et de 'ligamentum', qui vaut autant a dire comme loiemens, ce est a dire loiemens de Dieu.[30]

> [And some say elements are so called because of 'elion', which amounts to saying God, and 'ligamentum', which amounts to saying link, and so element means 'link to God'.]

The fact that the world is like an egg will be emphasized by the mythic dimension of the *fabula* of the cosmic egg and the inclusion of an etymological account of Ovid's name as coming from *Ovum et divido* (paragraphs 118 and 125), made famous by Honorius of Autun, William of Conches, Peter Abelard, Bernard Silvestre, and Hildegarde of Bingen.[31] The etymology of Ovid, which sums up the mystical dimension of the world and the methodology for under-

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[28] Aristotle himself takes a hard line with his natural philosophy, but his model of knowledge remains mathematic and theological.

[29] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 61 (p. 25).

[30] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 51 (p. 21).

[31] Dronke, *Fabula*, pp. 80–99; Thomasset, *Une vision du monde au XIIIᵉ siècle*, p. 31.

standing it, shows the importance of poetry for cosmological speculation. Ovid is then brought up not as a love poet, but as a cosmic poet, as at the beginning of the *Metamorphoses*.

Second, imagination and digression maintain an important function in the structure of the knowledge that Timéo transmits to Placides. The dialogue does not proceed with great care and lacks continuous, rigorous reasoning; very often, Timéo answers Placides's questions by using anecdotes or digressions instead of giving direct philosophical explanations. Since God has made a creation whose origin is impossible to know, humans themselves can only produce a *speculum* through a range of poetic words and images, in their language and in their mind. This stream of imagination and poetic creation is the only response and reaction that humans can provide with regard to the divine creation. Humans are created and they can only respond to this passive, ontological situation by naming and imagining. The only aim, finally, is to admire creation, not to understand it.

One example of the limits of the dialogue occurs when Placides raises doubts about the corporeality of air. Timéo gives answers about the corporeality of earth and water but not about air; he prefers to tell the anecdote of 'The Crafty Crow'.[32] He only gives an answer about the movement of bodies in the air ten paragraphs later. One could think that these digressions are the proof that Timéo has not fully mastered the philosophy, and it's probably true: the anonymous author of this dialogue is perhaps a scholar who did not study very long at university; perhaps he only studied in the Arts Faculty.

These digressions mean, however, that exempla and sense-based speculation are important (as we saw in first part of this chapter), and these digressions also mean that human knowledge sometimes needs fictional stories. In order to open up other questions about divine secrets, human discussions must aim at truth but must also respect the immensity of divine secrets. This leads to more and more questions without providing the solutions or resolutions that are available to God alone. The implication is that it is impossible to practise philosophy without imaginative digressions and anecdotes, without speculation and explanation.

Much more remains to be said: imagination through anecdotes reminds human beings that we must accept the unreachable secrets of God and the Phi-

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[32] This theological anecdote is not often diffused in the medieval literature. Nature allows animals to recognize the materiality of elements and to use their instinct. The anecdote shows that human reason can reach paradise through nature, power, or ingenuity, which is the choice of the crafty crow.

losophers. Imagination encourages humility: it is not possible to understand all the universe's secrets. While the author cannot overlook the philosophical contents, he is able to imagine the wonderful world and, through imagination, celebrate the infinite power of God.

At one point, Placides asks Timéo about the place of God before creation.[33] Philosophical debates about the beginning of the world were very significant at this period at the university, and Timéo doesn't answer, as he does often, when Placides asks him difficult philosophical questions. Instead of answering, Timéo tells the very famous anecdote of philosopher and child at the seashore, which is a topos of medieval literature;[34] Timéo could again be said to be dodging philosophical speculation, but we have to emphasize that this anecdote was read in sermons with the intention of humbling overweening philosophical pride.

Without imagination and the humility of fiction, philosophy may lead to madness. When Placides asks Timéo for understanding the intention and the place of God, Timéo answers his question:

'Placides', dist Timéo, 'par tant serés vous affolés, et autre fois sont, par teles pensees, affolé maint autre philosophes. Amphiteus, li philosophes, en queÿ en fantasie et cuida qu'il peust ce trouver et savoir et aloit foliant sur le rivage de le mer'.[35]

['Placides', said Timéo, 'you will lose your mind because of all these things and in the past, many other philosophers lost their mind from such thoughts. Amphiteus, the philosopher, fell through them into fantasy, and thought he could find and know this, and he walked along the seashore, having lost his mind'.]

The term 'affoler' in Old French is regularly used with a sentimental and loving meaning. Philosophers desire fervently know where is God and how he created the world, even unto madness and mental distraction, just as the loving man desires to join himself with his beloved, even unto death. Acquiring divine knowledge leads to a worrying passion and the possible destruction of philosophers themselves. Amphiteus goes mad from too much imagination or from a too great desire for a scientific knowledge of God.

In his search for the place of God, Amphiteus does not find (*trouver*) true knowledge; he invents (*trouver*) wrong things and delves into his imagination.

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[33] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 37 (p. 16).

[34] This anecdote (present in Cesaire of Heisterbach) shows that the scholar must always follow a humble approach whatever difficult problem of faith he has to resolve in using his intelligence.

[35] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 37 (p. 16).

Philosophers who claim to find the inaccessible secrets of God become crazy and find imaginative and empty things, whereas humble philosophers who are aware of these unreachable knowledges use their imagination and open their mind to digressions, in order to be laid open to mystical experience about the created world.

Let us make our third remark: the marvellous follows up this importance of imagination in philosophical speculation. Very often, Placides listens to Timéo and uses his senses in order to learn and to reflect, as we said, but as he learns, he is filled with wonder because he listens to his master not only as he reasons but as he tells the story of creation, saying and repeating a marvellous and great truth, one that reason cannot entirely reach.

As Placides, who learns a lot, thanks his master and seeks to express his enthusiasm for what he is learning, he frequently uses the term 'merveilles' (marvels) and the verb 'dites' (you say), as if he might pay tribute to the art of his master conveying clear knowledge, whose limits must, however, be accepted. The marvellous imagination, in its own humble way, can defy comprehension of all the enigmatic truths, without breaking into them.

'Maistres', ce dist Placides, 'vous me dites merveilles, se vous ne le me faites apertement entendre; vous m'avés dit qu'il est autant yaue comme terre, et airs comme yaue, et fus comme airs.

'Et si me dites que la mer et l'iaue siet sur la terre et moy semble que la terre siet sur l'iaue, car en nul lieu nuls ne porroit fouir, se il voloit parfont aller, qu'il ne trouvast yaue. Si me samble merveilles de ce que vous me dites, qui me dites que l'iaue siet sur le terre. Et pour ce que je me merveil, vous pri que vous le me dites'.[36]

'Placides', dist Timéo, 'de petit se merveille qui petit set et si me plaist que si bien savés demander, car, en ce que vous demandés hardiement, m'est il avis que vous avés grant couvoitise d'avoir le tresor de sapience'.[37]

['Master', said Placides, 'you tell me marvellous things although you do not make me understand it clearly. You said to me that there was as much water as earth, and as much air as water, and fire as air.

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[36] The relationship between knowledge and wonder is discussed in Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I. 2, 982b.

[37] *Placides et Timéo*, ed. by Thomasset, 57–58 (p. 23). Cf. p. 26: '"Maistres", ce dist Placides, [...] "quant plus parlés a moy, et plus sui esmerveilliés. [...] Quel corps a l'iaue, quel corps a li airs et quel corps a li fus? Ce sont merveilles!"' ('Master', said Placides, [...] 'the more you talk to me, the more I am amazed. [...] What kind of body does water have, what kind of body does air have, what kind of body fire? These are marvels!').

'And you to said me that sea and water rest on earth, whereas it seemed to me that earth rests on water, because if one went in any direction, even downwards, he would find water. And what you tell me seems marvellous, saying that water rests on the earth. And so I am filled with wonder. Please explain it to me'.

'Placides', said Timéo, 'he who marvels little knows little, and so I welcome the fact that you can ask me so cleverly because, you ask boldly, it seems to me that you have a great desire to gain the treasure of wisdom'.]

Timéo congratulates his wondering student because 'marvel' means the amazing curiosity of Placides, the infinite questions he constantly asks about the world. 'Marvel' means the wonders of the world too, the marvellous secrets of the universe that the humans can't reach and resolve, but they can imagine. The experience of wonder, as Plato described it,[38] establishes the correct attitude of one who desires to know and who is always prepared to imagine.

'Merveille' etymologically means admiration and fright. The marvellous appears suddenly in reality and wipes out the borders between the visible and the invisible, but the marvellous both honours and embellishes divine creation, the reality both supernatural and mysterious that is offered to our vision. The marvellous improves our imaginative mind and allows us to gaze at the continuum between natural law and God, and allows us to admire his divine freedom, which comprehends all possibilities of causes and effects in the world. According to Augustine, God decided that the same effects would be produced by the same causes, in order to prevent our madness.

Imagination might make it possible to see and to gaze at all this divine freedom, whereas reason might be blind and narrow-minded, dependent on necessarily ordered and settled laws of nature. The marvellous then reminds us of the absolute power of God and is an infinite source of learning and contemplating.

## *Conclusion*

Much more than any other text, *Placides e Timéo* emphasizes the overlap between our experience of nature and our admiration of divine creation, between speech and the order of things. This fictive text tries to prove itself worthy of the divine light. Seeing the natural world and naming the classified world are linked as foundations of speculation related to the senses and tested by theoretical discussions and the experiments of Aristotelian natural philosophy.

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[38] Plato, *Théétète* 155d: 'D'un philosophe ceci est le pathos: l'étonnement. Il n'existe pas d'autre origine de la philosophie'.

This anonymous text is unique in its language processing. In a very different way from the scholastic masters of the thirteenth century, who study words through Aristotle's systematic logic, Timéo uses words that can express the accession from physical experiments to mystical experiences of the created universe. The dialogue's language opens a door to enigmatic created nature and the capacities of imagination that attempt ceaselessly to translate it.

In this dialogue, the notion of the thought experiment gains its heuristic value through the use of processes of the imagination to short-circuit philosophical deduction, linking experience understood primarily as empirical impressions to a mystical experience. The leaps of imagination are not here simply tools of persuasion but could enable a different kind of thinking that is speculative and experimental, occurring when limited human creatures try to understand divine action.

Moreover, this narrative cosmological dialogue comprises an original encyclopaedic genre, which is based on the affective process of reading, drawing on desire and experience, and presenting two epistemological models: the Christianized Platonic model, which offers an ideal conception of science and knowledge, and the Aristotelian one, which inherits Plato's universality of science, but which, in opposition to Plato, innovates in the fields of ontology, singularity, and natural philosophy. The anonymous author does not try to reconcile the two philosophers, as Bonaventure does in the thirteenth century: Platonic idealism and Aristotelian naturalism simply merge into the process of imagination, which tries to see beyond visible things to perceive the invisible, divine principles of creation.

The truth calls, therefore, for a range of mental faculties, from the intellective to the imaginative, from divine and philosophical division to a speculation shaped by fiction and *fabulae*. Observation and experiments are seen as a temporary stage moving towards a deep and mystical experience of the vision offered by divine light. The Latin term *experientia* means first that phenomena are caused in order to be studied, *experientia* signifying that one is active in the process of understanding. In the dialogue, *experientia* outdoes this first step of experiment and resolves to the experience of poetry and the marvellous, to a consent to an admiring passivity. All of the encyclopaedic attempts of the dialogical genre will never reach the truth; this literature must rather use occlusion and omission to express all that we do not know, which is to say: the unified Whole. Being a brilliant philosopher matters little, so long as poetry says and glorifies the marvellous divine creation.

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'As I kan now remembre':
Memory and Making
in *The House of Fame*

Jane Griffiths

In recent years, after centuries of relative neglect, *The House of Fame* has become one of the most frequently discussed of Chaucer's works.[1] Both its former marginalization and its current popularity have much to do with the radical nature of the thought experiment to which it bears witness. As fictional representations of a mental phenomenon that is itself at one remove from waking, everyday reality, dream visions not only create a space in which potentially contentious subjects can be explored with a degree of 'deniability', but also (more importantly) allow the poet to think what would have been unthinkable in any other form: at their most experimental, they do not express a 'message', but enable the discovery of previously unrealized questions. Chaucer repeatedly utilizes the freedom provided by the form to explore the nature of the poet's authority, its relationship to his patrons and the literary past, and the usefulness of the written word in relation to lived experience. Notably, none of his dream visions provides any kind of 'answer' to the questions they explore. *The Parliament of Fowls* concludes with the poet's hope that by extensive reading he will one day 'mete som thyng for to fare | The bet' (ll. 698–99); the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* ends as he determines to write the *Legend* proper, and the final lines of *The Book of the Duchess* entirely collapse the distinction

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[1] The transition was marked by the publication of Delany, *Chaucer's 'House of Fame'*.

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between dreaming and writing, as the dreamer declares: 'This was my sweven; now hit ys doon' (l. 1334).[2] At best, the dream enables the writing of the poem, but it does not provide any concrete guidance as to how to write; instead, it documents dead ends. The implication is that the poems are not the result of a thought experiment but that they *are* the experiment, and that their subject is the representation of the poet's mental processes.

*The House of Fame* is Chaucer's most extreme exploration of the writing mind. Here, still more than in his other dream visions, questions of literary inheritance and the poet's relationship to his sources find expression in singularly destabilizing ways. The narrator, whose name 'Geffrey' invites us to identify him with Chaucer himself, recounts a dream which he characterizes as 'wonderful' (l. 62), but whose significance he is unable to determine. Finding himself in a temple dedicated to Venus, its walls covered with brass 'tables' engraved with images of Virgil's *Aeneid*, he attempts to use these as prompts for his own retelling of the story. He becomes doubtful as to their authenticity, however, and abruptly walks out of the temple into a barren landscape, where he is literally picked up by a golden eagle that swoops down from the sky and takes him to Fame's palace, promising that he will there find 'tidings' to write about: that is, material based on lived experience rather than on previous writing. Yet the eagle's confidence proves to be misplaced. Not only is Fame's palace far from free from literary tradition — its halls are populated by statues of famous writers — but Fame herself is exceptionally unreliable. Trumpeting forth an undiscriminating mixture of truth and falsehood, she does not provide escape from the dilemma that the narrator experienced in the temple, but recapitulates it in different terms. In despair, the narrator allows the eagle to carry him to the House of Rumour, a conspicuously insecure construction of twigs that spins in the air. Here even the appearance of order is lacking: it is filled with a cacophony of conflicting stories, true and false. And precisely at the point when Geffrey observes a man who 'semed for to be | A man of gret auctorite —' (ll. 2157–58), the poem breaks off, unfinished.

As even such a brief outline indicates, the difficulty of *The House of Fame* stems from its status as an experimental poetics: an attempt, on Chaucer's part, to explore the nature of his own writing through the medium of poetic fiction.[3] One significant way in which he does so is through engagement with contem-

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[2] All quotations from Chaucer's works will be taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson.

[3] Cf. Boitani, *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame*, pp. 189–216; Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages*, pp. 167–201.

porary rhetorical theory, in particular with the position of memory as the basis of creative activity.[4] As Mary Carruthers and Beryl Rowland have shown, there are formal correspondences between (on the one hand) the temple in Book I and Fame's palace in Book III and (on the other hand) the imaginary architectural structures which rhetorical treatises including Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* and the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium* identify as a vital component of memory arts.[5] This chapter argues that, in *The House of Fame*, Chaucer not only reflects the principles set out in such treatises but also tests their efficacy. Presenting memory arts as only one aspect of the writer's processes of recollection and invention, he suggests that memory's anarchic associations cannot fully be controlled. *The House of Fame* is thus not so much a poetics as an experiment in the exercise of poetic memory and poetic composition.

Prominent in *The House of Fame* are traces of an art of memory that is described, in only slightly variant forms, in a large number of classical and medieval rhetorical treatises. In one of the earliest of these, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, which remained popular throughout the medieval period, its principles are set out as follows:

> Constat igitur artificiosa memoria ex locis et imaginibus. Locos appellamus eos qui breviter, perfecte, insignite aut natura aut manu sunt absoluti, ut eos facile naturali memoria conprehendere et amplecti queamus: ut aedes, intercolumnium, angulum, fornicem, et alia quae his similia sunt. Imagines sunt formae quaedam et notae et simulacra eius rei quam meminisse volumus; quod genus equi, leonis, aquilae memoriam si volemus habere, imagines eorum locis certis conlocare oportebit.

> [The artificial memory includes backgrounds and images. By backgrounds I mean such scenes as are naturally or artificially set off on a small scale, complete and conspicuous, so that we can grasp and embrace them easily by the natural memory for example, a house, an intercolumnar space, a recess, an arch, or the like. An image is, as it were, a figure, mark, or portrait of the object we wish to remember; for example, if we wish to recall a horse, a lion, or an eagle, we must place its image in a definite background.][6]

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[4] For the intimate connection between memory and rhetorical invention, see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*.

[5] Rowland, 'Bishop Bradwardine, the Artificial Memory, and *The House of Fame*'; Carruthers, 'Italy, *Ars Memorativa*, and Fame's House'; for a useful overview of scholarship on artificial memory, see also Rowland, 'The Artificial Memory, Chaucer, and Modern Scholars'.

[6] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xvi.29. This is just one example of a common tradition; see also Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. by Russell, XI.2.1; Bradwardine, 'On Acquiring a Trained Memory', trans. by Carruthers.

The assumption here is that memory is a storehouse of material intended specifically for reuse, and that — although such material prompts verbal performance — it is predominantly visual. The purpose of the 'backgrounds' is to allow the placing of images that stand for what is to be remembered in an order rendered memorable by visual cues, so that the orator's mind may navigate freely among them, as through a familiar room or building; as the anonymous author of the treatise puts it: 'in quamlibebit partem quoque loco libebit, imaginibus commoniti, dicere possimus id quod locis mandaverimus' ('Reminded by the images, we can repeat orally what we have committed to the backgrounds, proceeding in either direction from any background we please').[7]

In *The House of Fame*, the most obvious reflection of this artificial memory system appears in Chaucer's descriptions of buildings that resemble the *Ad Herennium*'s 'backgrounds'. Thus, Carruthers argues that Fame's palace in Book III, in particular, follows

> the rules for making architectural backgrounds, in which are set vivid and unusual images-for-things [...]. In the rules of the architectural mnemonic for making 'backgrounds', one feature is constant, in addition to the use of rooms with lots of recesses and niches in them, and that is using a space which is 'intercolumnar'. Sure enough, Fame's hall is dominated by a double row of columns, each with a sculptured figure on top [...]. Each column is of a different material appropriately associated with some quality of the remembered author or his story [...]. Each column is a 'background' on which is 'placed' (literally 'seated') an *imago rei*. And while they fill the hall like rooks' nests on trees, they are 'placed' there 'be ordre', although the narrator does not choose to tell us about every one of them. Instead, he jumps into the middle of the order to 'find' the columns pertinent to the Troy story. In all of this, he behaves as one is supposed to when using an 'artificial' memory system.[8]

Even as Carruthers shows how the arrangement of Fame's palace follows the principles of artificial memory, she indicates how its practical use as finding aid for an individual orator simultaneously depends on and reveals a different kind of memory underlying it: namely, a shared cultural memory or inheritance — in this case, of the matter of Troy — to which the orator's trained memory gives him ready access.[9] In practice, however, individual and cultural memory prove not to be so seamlessly continuous. Although, as Carruthers argues, the narrator describes the background against which the statues of Fame's palace

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[7] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xviii.30.

[8] Carruthers, 'Italy, *Ars Memorativa*, and Fame's House', pp. 186, 188.

[9] Cf. Perez, 'Housing Memory in the Late Medieval Literary Tradition'.

appear in terms that clearly recall the houses of artificial memory, replete with 'pynacles [and] tabernacles [...]. And [...] in ech of the pynacles [...] sondry habitacles' (ll. 1189–94), it spectacularly fails to conform to the recommendation, in the *Ad Herennium*, that 'commodius est in derelicta quam in celebri regione locos conparare' ('it will be more advantageous to obtain backgrounds in a deserted than in a populous region') if the images are to function effectively.[10] Whereas the *Ad Herennium* argues that 'frequentia et obambulatio hominum conturbat et infirmat imaginum notas, solitudo conservat integras simulacrorum figuras' ('the crowding and passing to and fro of people confuse and weaken the impress of the images, while solitude keeps their outlines sharp'),[11] Fame's palace is rowdy; it heaves with groups of supplicants to the Queen and echoes with the sound of trumpets as her herald Eolus broadcasts to the world their good or bad reputations. It is not surprising, then, that the narrator struggles to make sense of what he finds there. He constantly questions 'Loo, how shulde I now telle al thys?' (l. 1341), 'What shuld I make lenger tale | Of alle the pepil y ther say?' (ll. 1282–83), while also declaring 'hit were al to longe to rede | The names' (ll. 1355–56) and 'yf y wolde her names telle, | Al to longe most I dwelle' (ll. 1505–06). The sheer profusion of images renders them ineffective. Despite a lengthy *occupatio* of that which he is failing to describe, the narrator several times denies that they are capable of prompting him to his own rhetorical display; although he asserts that 'Al the substance | I have yit in my remembrance' (ll. 1181–82), he admits nonetheless, 'Ne kan I not to yow devyse; | My wit ne may me not suffise' (ll. 1179–80). Instead he provides a list, or a series of lists, of the figures he sees recorded — musicians, magicians, and finally the supplicants to the Queen of Fame — linked by the frequent repetition of 'I saugh' and, occasionally, 'I herde' (l. 1201). His failure in Book III to turn the rich material stored up for him in the palace into a convincing rhetorical performance is indicative of the failure of a memory system in which remembered images serve as the matter for the poet or orator to clothe in words. The focus becomes Geffrey's struggle to make sense of the images, not the matter signified by the images themselves.

This struggle is anticipated in Book I of *The House of Fame*, at the point where the narrator encounters the engraved brass tables that record the story of Aeneas and begins to retell the story on the basis of what he sees there. Like the architecture of Fame's palace, the temple images initially seem to imply a fairly

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[10] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xix.31.

[11] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xix.31.

unproblematic process of transmission, in which rhetorical invention is based on the iconic representation of previous texts, which are reanimated by the narrator's interaction with them. In principle, at least, his retelling of the stories to which they bear witness represents what V. A. Kolve describes as

> a process of intellectual recall and imaginative response [...] exactly what the poem's title would lead us to expect, narrative art as a 'hous of fame' capable of preserving within men's memories the famous deeds of the past. In effect, we are shown a poet remembering a poem he has read as a series of pictures, by way of creating a new poem that describes those pictures as though they were real. The narrator's experience in *The House of Fame* offers a medieval paradigm of how narrative poems are made, responded to, and after that remembered.[12]

What Kolve describes is the process by which cultural memory is constructed and confirmed. Yet in Book I, as in Book III, artificial memory only partially enables the narrator's recollection of his matter. This is at least partly due to the fact that it has previously been treated by other authors. The very first image he encounters in the temple bears the lines: 'I wol now synge, yif I kan, | The armes and also the man' (ll. 143–44), clearly inviting him (and us) to identify the story recorded on the walls of the temple not simply as that of Aeneas, but specifically as Virgil's *Aeneid*. Just as clearly, though, it is not the *Aeneid* plain and simple. The deliberate misquotation of Virgil's famous opening — 'arma virumque cano' ('I sing the arms and the man') — draws attention to the existence of a gap between an original and its imitations, and between cultural and individual memory. It thus foreshadows what occurs when the narrator begins to retell the story of Aeneas. His immediate source is the series of engraved tables hanging on the walls of the temple (which are also the walls of his dreaming mind), but as he seeks to activate these memory images, he finds his version of events haunted by recollection of the *Aeneid* as a *verbal* work of art. There is thus a conflation of what, in memory arts, are two distinct types of memory: the memory of things and the memory of words. As the *Ad Herennium* puts it:

> Rerum similitudines exprimuntur cum summatim ipsorum negotiorum imagines conparamus; verborum similitudines constituuntur cum unius cuiusque nominis et vocabuli memoria imagine notatur.

> [Likenesses of matter are formed when we enlist images that present a general view of the matter with which we are dealing; likenesses of words are established when the record of each single noun or appellative is kept by an image.][13]

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[12] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, p. 42.

[13] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xx.33.

This is to say that this memory system is designed to enable an orator to remember either the order in which his topics should be addressed or the precise words to use. Both types of memory depend on the use of mental images, but memory of words is inevitably the more complex; because it is designed to allow verbatim replication of a pre-existing line or sentence, it requires an image to be used for each word, rather than a single one for the entire topic. The images which the narrator encounters in Book I of *The House of Fame* stand for 'things', or topics, rather than words — yet just as, in Book III, the narrator hears as well as sees the images in Fame's palace, here too the boundary between visual and verbal is permeable. Aeneas, for example, is *seen* to be 'Crynge, "Allas and welaway!"' (l. 170), while Creusa and her children are oxymoronically said to flee 'with drery *chere*, | That hyt was pitee for to *here*' (ll. 179–80, my emphasis). In itself, this need not be problematic; as Carruthers has argued, in medieval discussions of memory, images were not necessarily conceived as 'limited solely to the visual sense'.[14] Yet in view of the allusion to Virgil on the first brass table, the lack of specificity about what the narrator 'hears' indicates that there are limits on what he 'kan [...] remembre'; it is as if a potentially effective memory of things is intruded upon by an imprecise memory of words — that is, by Virgil's words themselves, not by orderly images of them. Indeed, the marginal glosses that survive in the earliest manuscripts of *The House of Fame* make visible Virgil's exact phrasing alongside Chaucer's text, and thus provide a physical correlative of the mental haunting experienced by the narrator.[15] Still more than the misengraved quotation, then, the half-heard figures reveal considerable anxiety about the efficacy of memory arts as an aid to invention.

This anxiety is explored further when the narrator comes to the table showing Aeneas's abandonment of Dido. Unlike those of Creusa and Aeneas himself, her image is not seen to speak without words, but does indeed speak articulately and at length, moving from complaint at Aeneas's departure through a discussion of her plight as exemplifying that of all women, to her forceful denunciation of Fame:

> O wel-away that I was born!
> For thorgh yow [i.e. Aeneas] is my name lorn,
> And alle myn actes red and songe
> Over al thys lond, on every tonge.
> O wikke Fame! — for ther nys

[14] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 67–68.

[15] See further Griffiths, *Diverting Authorities*, pp. 56–63.

> Nothing so swift, lo, as she is!
> O, soth ys, every thing ys wyst,
> Though hit be kevered with the myst. (ll. 345–52)

Since this lament is voiced by the narrator, Dido's eloquence implies that he is using the techniques of memory arts very effectively. Yet it also indicates the potentially disorderly nature of the process of recollection. What here appears as Dido's subjective condemnation of Fame is derived from an attack on Fame in Virgil's voice in the *Aeneid* (iv.174); her speech is at once faithful to and significantly different from its source. In theory, this is proof of the narrator's skilled invention, but he himself is troubled by such discrepancies. In ventriloquizing Dido, he departs from Virgil's account of Aeneas's abandonment of her under influence of Ovid's very different version of the story, and it is when he realizes that this is what he is doing that he abruptly abandons his narration with an instruction to his readers to 'rede Virgile in Eneydos | Or the Epistle of Ovid' (ll. 378–79) to find out what happened. As has frequently been observed, his frustration is in part due to the realization that two supposedly 'authoritative' versions of the same story contradict one another, thus calling into question the 'truth value' of cultural memory by suggesting that the source of what is written is inaccessible and even unidentifiable; Geffrey voices a comparable irritation when he leaves the temple because he realizes that he does not know 'whoo did [...] wirche' its images (l. 474). Yet his frustration is also directed at the fallibility of his own memory processes, and notably with their failure to be governed by the techniques of memory arts. With Dido, still more than with Aeneas and Creusa, the problem seems to be that the link between image and words is not exact. When the material to be memorized is textual, it proves impossible for the narrator to hold in mind images that are independent of the words in which they have previously been realized. What he has been producing is not an account of Aeneas but — through a series of accretions, juxtapositions, and associations — an account of attempting to remember how the story of Aeneas goes.

The narrator's difficulties, then, are due in part to the inflection of a systematized memory of things with an unsystematized memory of words, and in part to the (textual) nature of the material that he seeks to recollect. This is apparent not just from the difficulty he experiences in expounding the temple images, but from the contrast between that difficulty and Aeneas's own encounter with the story of his life in Book i of the *Aeneid* at the point when, having been shipwrecked near Carthage, he is directed by Venus to the temple where he will meet Dido (i.441–93). Here, as in *The House of Fame*, episodes from his history are recorded in brass on the walls; as in *The House of Fame*, too,

these images serve as a shorthand for what will be told more expansively in words rather than pictures when Aeneas later enthralls Dido by recounting the fall of Troy. Yet there the similarities end. Whereas, in *The House of Fame*, the engraved tables are — potentially at least — prompts for the narrator's verbal rendition of the narrative, in the *Aeneid* Aeneas's viewing of the brass images occurs separately from his own verbal account of the fall of Troy in Book II. This contrast reaffirms that the problem experienced by the narrator of *The House of Fame* is one of the *kind* of memory available to him. As Carruthers has argued, Aristotle — and after him other influential writers including Avicenna and Aquinas — envisaged 'the materials for thinking [...] as mental creations, *phantasmata*' which derived from sense impressions channeled to the imagination and were acted upon by reason in order to create a conceptual form that was 'affective in nature [...] sensorily derived and emotionally charged'.[16] For Aeneas, the affective quality of his memories derives from experience, and the separation of Virgil's description of the images of the fall of Troy from Aeneas's narration of it tellingly implies that Aeneas has no need of the prompts provided by the engravings in order to remember. The events that they record and to which they give public 'fame' are already indelibly marked in his own mind; his *is* the experience, the truth, source, or origin which they commemorate. In his viewing of the story of his life, he confronts an artificial memory system designed to enable the reconstruction, by others, of what he is already independently able (or rather, not able *not*) to recollect; it is this externalization of private memory that makes his encounter with his past self so poignant. In contrast, the narrator of *The House of Fame* has nothing personal to which he can refer any of the representations. The emotion he attaches to them is derived from his reading, rather than from his senses, and it is significant that, when he leaves the temple, he declares his intention to look for 'any *stiryng* man | That may telle me where I am' (ll. 478–79, my emphasis). Like Troilus exclaiming to Pandarus 'Thy proverbs may me naught availle [...] Let be thine old ensamples, I thee pray!' (*Troilus & Criseyde*, 1.756, 759), or the Wife of Bath asserting that 'Experience though noon auctoritee | Were in this world, is right ynogh for me' ('The Wife of Bath's Prologue', ll. 1–2), he doubts the relevance of all this imperfectly remembered bookish stuff.[17] Yet although his abrupt exit is an attempt to find a real presence, something that is not the product of his own

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[16] This description of the process is very much simplified; for full discussion, see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 56–81; the quotations are from pp. 67 and 75.

[17] Cf. Kennedy, 'Rhetoric and Meaning in *The House of Fame*', p. 10.

attempt to reanimate a statue or image that represents previously animated matter, the result is that he finds himself in a desert wasteland. Although, being deserted, it has the potential to serve as a perfect background, it is without defining features: without identifiable locations in which to position memory images, and without images as well. Unlike Aeneas, the narrator has no material of his own to substitute for that of others. In abandoning the temple and its visual representations of previous writing, it seems that he has abandoned the possibility of invention, too.

The eagle initially seems to offer a solution. Descending at the very moment that the narrator prays to be saved from 'fantome and illusion' (ll. 492–94), it appears to be precisely the kind of living presence he desires. Moreover, when it declares that it has been sent to give him access to 'tidings' — entirely new material for his writing — it stresses that these will take the form of words spoken by living men, and contrasts them with the book learning to which Geffrey has been accustomed, sitting 'domb as any stoon' (l. 656) over his reading matter as if he were himself a mute memory image awaiting activation. Explicitly linking the spoken word with lived experience and the written word with 'dead' textual authority, it seems to offer an escape from both previous writings and the techniques of memory arts. Not only does the kind of subject-matter it promises (the very words spoken by Geoffrey's contemporaries) appear to be specifically non-textual, but in asserting that speeches that reach Fame's palace take the shape of the body of the speakers — it says that each speech 'wexeth lyk the same wight | Which that the word in erthe spak' (ll. 1076–77) — it also collapses the distinction between memory of things and memory of words. Rather than an approximate visual record of previous writings, the embodied speeches are pure word, word made image; not only do they provide new words, which have not previously been written, but they are also free from the conflation found in the temple images. What the eagle seems to promise, then, is not just a new kind of source but also direct, unmediated access to it, free from haunting by the words through which previous writers have animated the same matter.

Closer investigation, however, shows that things are not so simple. Geffrey's fear of 'fantome and illusion' recalls his rather confused description of the classification of dreams in the proem, where one of the types of dream he alludes to is the 'fantome': an illusory, deceptive dream. His use of the term when he leaves the temple suggests that he aligns its images with such nightmares.[18] Yet

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[18] For earlier examples of this sense, see Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, pp. 114, 116, and (for discussion of contemporary dream theory) pp. 1–34.

the word 'fantome' might also translate the Aristotelian 'phantasmata' ('mental image'), and — since it appears as part of Geffrey's dream — the eagle is itself just such an image, as much of an 'illusion' as the situation from which it promises deliverance. As Carruthers has argued, dream images, which 'arise spontaneously', were technically held to be distinct from memory images, which occur 'in response to a controlled process like recollection'.[19] In *The House of Fame*, however, one of the problems is that this distinction does not hold. The eagle is both a dream image and, like the engravings in the temple, the product of Geffrey's reading. Not only is it a direct descendant of the eagle in Dante's *Commedia*, which prefigures the narrator's arrival in purgatory by appearing to him in a dream (*Purgatorio* IX.19–20), but it is closely associated with the memory arts from which it seems to promise escape. Just as the desert landscape where it descends fulfills the recommendation, in the *Ad Herennium*, that a memory background should be deserted, the eagle itself also has a counterpart in the treatise:

> Imagines sunt formae quaedam et notae et simulacra eius rei quam meminisse volumus; quod genus equi, leonis, *aquilae* memoriam si volemus habere, imagines eorum locis certis conlocare oportebit.

> [An image is, as it were, a figure, mark, or portrait of the object we wish to remember; for example if we wish to recall a horse, a lion, *or an eagle*, we must place its image in a definite background.][20]

The absurdity of plucking this incidental eagle from its original context and embodying it in a poem is emphasized by its inappropriately and comically active behaviour. Not only does it advise Geffrey to abandon his books, but — far from remaining passively posed against its background, waiting to be put into words — it refuses to be silent, insistently communicating its theories of speech and sound and offering to explain the names and nature of the stars and signs of the zodiac. Rather than enabling Geffrey's verbal performance, it reduces him to monosyllabic answers. It also contrasts with more conventional memory images in what it represents. Whereas, in the *Ad Herennium*, the imaginary eagle stands for a real one, so that there is a simple equivalence between image and referent, Chaucer's eagle does not 'stand for' a single thing, but rather for an accretion of textual associations. It has antecedents not only in Dante's eagle and that of the *Ad Herennium*, but in *The Consolation of*

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[19] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 73.

[20] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xvi.29. Italics mine.

*Philosophy* too; as John Leyerle has argued, the narrator's observation that 'A thought may flee so hye | With fetheres of Philosophye' (ll. 973–74), precisely at the moment when he is himself being flown high in the claws of his feathered guide, echoes Philosophy's promise that 'I schal schewe thee the weye that schal bryngen thee ayen unto thyne hous; and I schal fycchen fetheris in thi thought, by whiche it mai arisen in heighte' (iv.pr.1).[21] Like the images in the temple, then, the eagle is an associative image, and one that takes its colour from previous writing, rather than from experience.

Moreover, still more strikingly than the temple images, its conflation of a variety of sources is distinctly ad hoc. Whereas the kind of recollection fostered by memory arts was an orderly and sequential one, creating associative groups of images that might be described as a '*catena* or chain', the eagle is not one link in a secure sequence, but embodies a large number of allusions simultaneously, and in no particular order.[22] It thus reprises the challenge to the ordering principles of memory arts that is also implicit in the narrator's encounters with memory images in the temple and in Fame's palace, but — because one of its sources *is* a memory art — it does so still more emphatically. It is thus one of the most important means by which Chaucer indicates that, in *The House of Fame*, traces of memory arts serve less as a reliable means of recollecting material external to the poet than as a means of exploring the unreliable workings of the poet's own mind. In Christiania Whitehead's words:

> Far from acting to assist the reader in recalling the principal authors and narratives of the western literary tradition, Chaucer's use of images and architectural locations appears primarily designed to assist him in comprehending the workings and capacities of his own memory, and in understanding the way in which one text and one idea from within his *own* mental repertoire of previously stored impressions can lead, semi-irrationally, to another.[23]

In order fully to understand the radical nature of the thought experiment represented by the eagle, we should first step back and examine the model of mind that underpins *The House of Fame*. When, early in the poem, the narrator apostrophizes 'Thought, that wrot al that I mette, | And in the tresorye hyt shette | Of my brayn' (ll. 523–25), he echoes, in general terms, the Aristotelian conception of the mind as a series of chambers, of which memory is the hinder-

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[21] Leyerle, 'Chaucer's Windy Eagle', p. 253.

[22] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 78.

[23] Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind*, pp. 183–84.

most.[24] This model of the mind is intimately connected with the image, common to many classical and medieval memory arts, of the memory chamber as a treasure-house. Cicero made the association, as did Isidore of Seville in his *Sententiae*, and John Trevisa in his translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De Proprietatibus Rerum*:

> The innere witte is departid aþre by þre regiouns of þe brayn, for in þe brayn beþ þre smale celles. Þe formest hatte *ymaginatiua*, þerin þingis þat þe vttir witte apprehendiþ withoute beþ i-ordeyned and iput togedres withinne […]. Þe middil chamber hatte *logica* þerin þe vertu estimatiue is maister. Þe þridde and þe laste is *memoratiua*, þe vertu of mynde. Þat vertu holdiþ and kepiþ in *þe tresour of mynde* þingis þat beþ apprehendid and iknowe bi þe ymaginatif and *racio*.[25]

Trevisa's description shows how this schematization of the mind as a series of chambers can be mapped onto the architectural structures of *The House of Fame*.[26] These not only recall memory palaces, but — since the poem is a dream vision — are demonstrably located within the dreamer's head; it seems that Chaucer is doing something analogous to what David Cowling has identified as a commonplace of French *rhétoriqueur* poetry of the sixteenth century: using an architectural metaphor to 'articulate the notion that the mind is a series of interconnected architectural spaces' and presenting 'the narrator's allegorical journey […] as a passage from one room of his mind to another, or as the allegorical transposition of a process of psychological enlightenment'.[27] The temple, with its particular stress on mediating the sense impressions of seeing and hearing, provided by the 'vttir witte', may be read as modelled loosely on the chamber of the imagination; Fame's palace may represent not just the architectural background of memory arts, but also the *architecture-like* schematization of the mind that informed those arts.

Read in this context, the eagle, with its active movement, its transformative reasoning on the subject of knowledge and the senses, and its association with thought derived from *The Consolation of Philosophy*, may be read as a feathered embodiment of what Trevisa calls the 'vertu estimatiue', moving from the foremost ventricle of the mind to the memory chamber at the rear of

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[24] See further Harvey, *The Inward Wits*.

[25] Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, ed. by Seymour, I. 98; vernacular italics mine. See also Cicero, *De oratore*, I.iv.18; Isidore of Seville, *Sententiae*, I.13.7, ed. by Migne, col. 564C; cf. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 40–41.

[26] Cf. Evans, 'Chaucer in Cyberspace', pp. 59–61.

[27] Cowling, *Building the Text*, pp. 120–21.

the head. Indeed, it is possible that Trevisa should be identified as yet another source for Chaucer's bird. There are several points in the eagle's instruction of the narrator that seem to echo Trevisa's text. Not only does Trevisa write that '*Visus* "þe sight" haþ þe name of *viuacitas*, þat is "liflichnesse"' — a line that anticipates the eagle's insistence on the lifelikeness of the embodied speeches it describes — but there are also terms in Trevisa's description of the sense of hearing that foreshadow the eagle's notoriously elaborate explanation of how sound travels.[28] The eagle's use of the visual image of ripples spreading from a stone dropped in water to describe sound (ll. 765–822) has long been recognized as fusing Holcot's analysis of the operation of sound with a playfully garbled version of Robert Grosseteste's theory.[29] Yet Trevisa's assertion that the sense of hearing is 'aiery, for alwey it is igendrid by aier ismyte [...]. For þe heringe, as it were in a maner windinge aboute, fongiþ þe aier þat is ismyte al aboute and nouȝt istreiȝt [and] forþriȝt', emphasizes the circuitous passage of the air just as the eagle does, as well as anticipating its rhetorical circumlocutions.[30] It is significant, then, that Trevisa, too, mentions an eagle; his discussion of the 'lifelikeness' of sight is followed immediately by a reference to 'foules as þe egle wiþ croked clawis ben scharpe of sight'.[31] This juxtaposition not only suggests that Trevisa is among Chaucer's sources, confirming that his bird is an extreme instance of his habit of conflation, but also reveals something of the poet's practice of purely verbal association. Just as Geffrey's memory of things was disrupted by his imperfect memory of words when he viewed the images in the temple, the eagle too is evidence of such intrusion. Trevisa's discussion of the inner senses, including memory, occurs in the context of a wider discussion of the physical constitution of the human mind and senses; it is followed first by a paragraph on imagination and memory and then by a longer one on the 'vertu sensible':

> The vertu sensible þat meueþ is departid aþre. On partie hatte *naturalis* and þe oþir *vitalis* and þe þridde *animalis*. Þe vertu þat hatte *naturalis* meueþ þe humours in þe body of a best be þe veynes [...] þe vertu þat hatte *vitalis*, þe vertu of lif [...] meueþ

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[28] Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, ed. by Seymour, I. 107–11.

[29] See for example Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p. 151; Grennen, 'Science and Poetry in Chaucer's *House of Fame*', pp. 42–43; Irvine, 'Medieval Grammatical Theory and Chaucer's *House of Fame*'; cf. also Boitani, *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame*, pp. 212–16; Crombie, *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science*, pp. 112–13.

[30] Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, ed. by Seymour, I. 114.

[31] Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, ed. by Seymour, I. 112.

þe spiritis þat comeþ out of þe herte [...]. Þe vertu þat hatte *animalis motiua* haþ place in þe smale chambres of þe brayn.[32]

Like the eagle, then, the *animalis motiua* is associated with the chambers of the mind. Literally, Trevisa describes it as that power by which the limbs are moved; it might be translated as 'animate or vital movement'. But if Chaucer's eagle is partly derived from Trevisa, it may also be read as a preposterous, embodied 'mistranslation' of '*animalis motiua*' as 'the movement of the animal'. The eagle thus not only represents the faculty of thought, or reason, but also shows the bookish and disorderly nature of that thought in action; it symbolizes the poet's semi-irrational processes of association.

It is in this light that we should reconsider what Whitehead has identified as the 'unprecedented' duplication of memory houses in Book III of *The House of Fame*. As we have seen, Fame's palace is associated with the kind of architectural mnemonic recommended by memory arts, and it is when the narrator discovers that he can make little use of such a formal memory system that he is taken by the eagle to the House of Rumour. Whereas Fame's palace had at least the appearance of authority, the House of Rumour is flamboyantly unstable. It is made of wickerwork, and in perpetual motion:

> An hous, that Domus Dedaly,
> That Laboryntus cleped ys,
> Nas mad so wonderlych, ywis,
> Ne half so queyntelych ywrought.
> And ever mo, as swift as thought,
> This queynte hous aboute wente. (ll. 1920–25)

This duplication of memory houses provides a perfect emblem of the conflict between and conflation of the different types of memory that are found throughout the poem. The explicit statement that the House of Rumour is 'swift as thought' contrasts it directly with the stony statues that furnish Fame's palace, suggesting that — rather than reflecting the arts of memory — it is a concrete realization of the poet's own memory chamber. It gives graphic representation to the chaotic processes of association that have been in evidence throughout the poem, and that are tellingly emblematized when the narrator sees 'fals and soth compouned | Togeder fle for oo tydynge' (ll. 2108–09). Abandoning attempts to impose a formal order, Geffrey conveys us to what,

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[32] Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, ed. by Seymour, I. 99.

in Ruth Evans's words, is 'a dizzying but exhilarating imagining of the archive without any of its gatekeeping functions'.[33]

We seem, then, to have arrived at a representation of the memory chamber at the back of the poet's head: not an artful memory palace, but his own *memoria*, whose recollections combine uninhibitedly, free from systems designed to harness them. Yet the allusion to Daedalus complicates matters further. It shows the ancestry of the House of Rumour to be as literary as that of the eagle: to understand it, it is necessary to have in mind the complexity of Ovid's or Virgil's description of Daedalus's labyrinth and then imagine something more complicated still. Despite being treated with acknowledged freedom, the contents of the poet's mind remain essentially bookish, and the reading of them assumes an equivalent bookishness on the part of his readers. Like several other of *The House of Fame*'s allusions to previous writing, including Aeneas's encounter with a representation of his own life story and the descent of the eagle, the allusion to Daedalus is a 'silent' one: recognition of it depends on the reader engaging in precisely that process of associative memory that distresses the narrator in Book I, when he realizes what a muddle of matter, irreducible to a secure sequence of images, his mind contains. Even if the memories found in the House of Rumour are honestly disorderly ones, in which things and words are explicitly conflated, they prove not to be free of pre-texts any more than the temple or the palace are.

Yet the allusion to Daedalus also conveys doubts about the value of the poet's intensely practical and associative kind of memory. Both the labyrinth Daedalus built to house the Minotaur and the wings by means of which he and Icarus attempted to escape from Crete — which are also mentioned in *The House of Fame* (ll. 919–24) — were notorious for failing in their intended purposes. As James Heffernan has argued, not only was Daedalus's inventiveness indirectly responsible for the death of his son, but in the *Aeneid* Virgil emphasizes Daedalus's subsequent inability to portray Icarus's fall in sculpture (VI.30–33).[34] The House of Rumour is thus identified not just as the work of a maker, but specifically as the work of an unsuccessful maker, leading to significant doubts about the value of any creation that occurs there.[35] Indeed, Chaucer's imitation of those parts of the *Aeneid* that raise the very questions about the relationship between experience and representation (and representa-

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[33] Evans, 'Chaucer in Cyberspace', p. 63; cf. Kinch, '"Mind Like Wickerwork"'.

[34] Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, p. 29.

[35] Indeed, Gillespie has argued that Chaucer ultimately locates authority wholly outside of the author, in the 'tydynges' themselves, and in the readers' responses to them ('Lunatics, Lovers, and Poets', p. 35).

tion and books) that are central to *The House of Fame* as well implies that even anxiety around representation is a memory of previous reflections on the business of writing. Neither experience nor authority is to be trusted, and neither can be disentangled from the other. It is not surprising that the poem concludes with ostentatious irresolution, breaking off precisely at the point where the man who 'semed for to be | A man of gret auctorite' (ll. 2157–58) is about to speak.

Yet despite (or perhaps because of) its lack of a formal conclusion, *The House of Fame* shows Chaucer attempting a radical thought experiment. Juxtaposing the techniques of memory arts with a model of mind that represents not the matter of thought, but thought's processes, not only reveals problems inherent in using memory arts as a practical aid to composition, but offers as a substitute the flight of the mind in which there is no viable distinction to be maintained between memory of words and memory of things. Creating a play between the two types of representation that is both the subject of the poem and the means by which its creation is imagined, *The House of Fame* shows how the diverse and inchoate processes of recollection that go into the making of a poem can be only partially represented or contained by formal memory arts.

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# Affective Meditation in Hand Mnemonics and Devotional Texts, from *Amor Dei* to Fear of Judgement

Julia Bourke

An experiment can be a trial or test of something — an idea, a hypothesis, a physical object. At its Latin root, though, to experiment is also to experience. As Jonathan Morton notes in the Introduction to this volume, thought experiments are not always, or not only, intellectual exercises, but also imagined scenarios that invite or demand an affective response from their participants. Such thought experiments generate a form of knowledge that is experiential, emotional, and embodied. Their 'truth', if they have any, arises not from their relationship to the physical world, but rather from the emotional resonances they create.

It is in this sense that medieval devotional texts can be understood as thought experiments; they seek to help readers generate, deepen, or intensify the experience of particular affective states. Such meditative texts are, to use Sarah McNamer's term, 'intimate scripts', and the reader or meditant's embodied experience becomes the theatre in which such scripts are enacted and re-enacted.[1] Although certain textual features provide indications that a work was designed as an emotional script — features such as direct address to the reader, emotional imperatives to 'imagine', 'feel', or 'consider' particular stimuli,

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[1] McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, p. 12.

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and appeals to the internal senses — it should be noted that a specific style of engaged, imaginative, participatory reading is needed to animate these features. In other words, an intimate script requires an actor. Instead of moving a public audience, however, intimate scripts invite personal, internal performance, allowing the actor/meditant/reader to play out particular affective scenes and progressions in the theatre of *memoria*, experimenting with their own emotional response.

Here, we will explore how and why emotions were induced by a variety of medieval meditations, demonstrating a range of emotional responses invoked by medieval meditants in response to a variety of imagined scenes. In particular, this chapter will examine two pairs of previously unresearched Cistercian hand diagrams with the aim of explaining and situating them within the context of monastic mnemonic training. These hands describe meditations to stir up fear and love of God, fear of death and judgement, and hope of resurrection. The development of similar meditative techniques is then traced within the longer history of affective piety, from the first meditation of St Anselm (*c.* 1033–1109) through to the judgement meditation in *De institutione inclusarum* by the Cistercian abbot Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167). Alongside these free prose works, the more structured meditations probably composed by Cistercian Stephen of Sawley (d. 1252) on the joys of the Virgin are considered. Their formulaic structure is suggested as a link between the highly organized hand diagrams and the devotional prose texts with which historians of affective piety are more familiar. Finally, it is suggested that meditations like those of Aelred and Anselm are in fact extended, elaborate forms of a monastic meditative practice closely related to mnemonics and only rarely recorded textually.

Before proceeding, however, it may be useful to define some terms. First, some attempt must be made to outline the scope of that difficult word, 'emotion'. Emotions, feelings, emotional states, affective states, and affect — terms which I use interchangeably here — can be understood as the total state of an individual's inward experience at a particular moment. These states of being encompass thoughts, feelings, desires, and points of pain or pleasure, not divorced from conscious thought or rationality, but rather examined in the same way they are experienced: inseparably. An individual need not necessarily be aware of their own affective state. An emotion, in this broad sense, is the 'colour' or 'flavour' of our thoughts. It is a mode of experiencing that can be suddenly brought to our awareness, or so habitual that we are not aware that it has any colour at all.

Second, it may be necessary to reflect on our assumptions regarding practices that claim to *make one feel* a particular way. Although some may regard the

idea of deliberate feeling with scepticism, there is strong evidence from modern research to suggest that actively trying to induce an emotion can enhance an individual's emotional response.[2] Although the affective states discussed here are the result of deliberate effort and specific meditative practices, this should not imply that they are any less legitimate, or less keenly felt, than spontaneous or naturally arising emotion. It is true that in one sense, these practised emotions are artificial, because they are crafted or created — they are emotional *artifacta*. Nevertheless, they are not fake. A scripted feeling is not necessarily insincere.

## Cistercian Hand Mnemonics

Although affective meditation, and particularly meditation on the Passion, has been the subject of a great deal of recent scholarly attention, studies have tended to focus on meditations in extended passages of prose.[3] Sarah McNamer's ground-breaking work, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, introduced the idea of devotional texts as 'intimate scripts'. Drawing on William Reddy's concept of emotives, McNamer defines intimate scripts as 'quite literally scripts for the performance of feeling — scripts that often explicitly aspire to performative efficacy'.[4] These scripts, McNamer argues, share a number of identifiable features:

> Many are scripted as first-person, present-tense utterances, designed to be enacted by the reader. Others work through interpellation, hailing the reader as 'you' and directing affective response, even prescribing the gestures that will generate compassion ('behold him', 'embrace him'). Still others stage detailed, vividly imagined scenes from the Passion and cast the reader as feeling eyewitness and participant. The participatory, performative character of these texts is often enhanced through the use of apostrophes and exclamations, deictic rhetoric ('here', 'there'), and regular use of the dramatic present.[5]

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[2] This is achieved through the brain's property of neuroplasticity, a concept that is fundamental to modern neuroscience; see, for example, Immordino-Yang and others, 'Neural Correlates of Admiration and Compassion'; Christou-Champi, Farrow, and Webb, 'Automatic Control of Negative Emotions'. For the application of these ideas to medieval sources, see Bourke, 'An Experiment in "Neurohistory"', pp. 130–36.

[3] For example, McNamer, *Affective Meditation*; Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*; Lazikani, *Cultivating the Heart*. Some notable exceptions focus on images and visual stimulus, including Lipton, *Dark Mirror*, esp. pp. 95–128; Bale, *Feeling Persecuted*; and Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*.

[4] McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, p. 12; Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, pp. 104–05.

[5] McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, p. 12.

Such texts invite readers to experiment with affect by drawing on a set of generic conventions: direct address to the reader; an inhabited 'I', which McNamer calls 'the psalmic "I"';[6] emotional imperatives to think or feel; and appeals to the internal senses. McNamer's approach has been immensely fruitful as far as it concerns literary meditations, but it is not yet clear to what extent her model can be applied to meditations in other formats, or those that incite emotions other than compassion.[7]

McNamer's intimate scripts require a particular kind of imaginative reading in order that their emotional potential be fully realized. The role of imagination in meditation and devotion has been explored in detail by Michelle Karnes, who argues for the importance of the thirteenth-century theologian Bonaventure in casting imagination as the cognitive mechanism of transcendence. As Karnes notes, however, Bonaventure 'departs from certain conventions in the genre [of gospel meditation] only to build upon others', including those found in the works of Aelred of Rievaulx and specifically in *De institutione inclusarum*.[8] Throughout the Middle Ages, Karnes argues, imaginative meditation was seen as a mechanism for revealing truth.[9] Although the precise nature of this mechanism was theorized differently at different points — most notably in Bonaventure's synthesis of Augustinian and Aristotelian theories of knowledge, cognition, and imagination — Karnes's research suggests that its cognitive and theological function was significant throughout the period.[10] Although her study is restricted to gospel meditations, Karnes's findings have implications for affective piety more broadly. Indeed, Karnes questions the use of the term 'affective piety' and argues for a stronger emphasis on the intellectual role of meditation and imagination.[11] Like Karnes, I would stress that there is no true division in medieval monastic thought between affect and cognition, and imaginative involvement is key to practices of meditation. Nevertheless, meditations considered here all express goals that are explicitly affective. They aim to excite,

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[6] McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, p. 68; see also Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, p. 160.

[7] This problem is exacerbated by existing methodologies in the history of emotions, which has developed a particular emphasis on emotion-words, thus effectively limiting the scope of the field to written sources. The most influential work to take this approach is without doubt Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*.

[8] Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition*, pp. 120–21.

[9] Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition*, p. 4.

[10] Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition*, pp. 63–110.

[11] Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition*, pp. 17–18.

arouse, or stir up particular feelings in the meditant, using generic conventions that remain relatively consistent across various formats.

Cognition and imagination in these meditations are at the service of memory. The style of reading and imagining required to make full use of McNamer's intimate scripts has arguably more in common with monastic techniques of memory training than with other kinds of reading practice. In fact, the best way to approach and understand these extended textual meditations may be to view them as expanded forms of simpler prayers that could be taught, memorized, and recalled without any need for textual stimulus. These foundational practices are not abbreviated forms of extended prose meditations, but rather are fundamental to monastic devotion. Rather than considering extended textual meditations as the norm — a quirk of scholarship resulting from the nature of evidence and its survival — we must shift our perspective to see internalized affective meditation as a monastic standard. When 'condensed' or 'abbreviated' meditations are considered standard, the detailed prose meditations of authors like Aelred can be contextualized as unusually elaborate variations on a well-established theme.

The importance of this perspectival shift regarding the reader/meditant's approach to text will become clearer when diagrammatic, mnemonic meditations are considered in more detail. Although recorded in image and text, these meditations are designed to transcend both, being clearly intended for memorization and practice beyond the manuscript context in which they are preserved. In Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.38, four full-page illustrations show two pairs of mnemonic aids for meditation overlaid on images of two pairs of hands.[12] The subjects of these meditations are *timor Dei* and *amor Dei* (fear and love of God on the left and right hands respectively, fols 146$^v$–147$^r$, Figure 2) and a *meditatio nocturna* paired with *meditatio diurna* (evening and morning meditations, fols 148$^v$–149$^r$, Figure 3). In each image, the hand is subdivided by lines representing knuckles and joints, and each region is inscribed with a point of contemplation, to be counted off as the meditation progresses. The *timor* and *amor* meditations appear to function as a pair; a heading instructs the meditant to read both hands together. Beginning in the centre of the palm, the meditant moves first along the thumb on the left hand (who should you fear?), counting along the spaces between the joints to reach the tip, before moving to the thumb on the right hand (who should you love?), then back to the upper palm of the left hand and along the index finger, and so on. The *nocturna* and

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[12] Cambridge, Trin. Coll., MS B.15.38, fols 146$^v$–147$^r$ and fols 148$^v$–149$^r$.
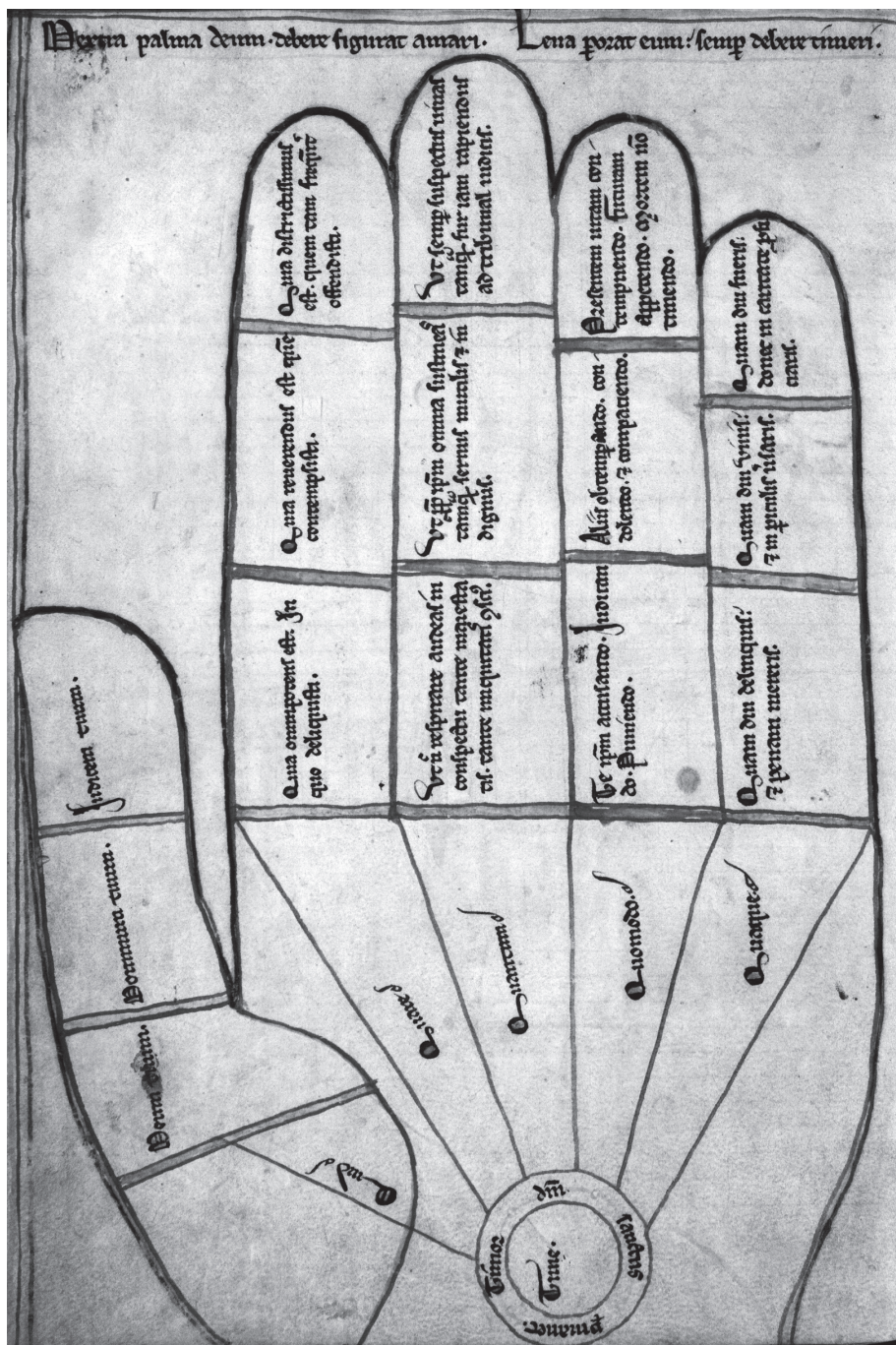
Figure 2. Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.38, fols 146ᵛ–147ʳ. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 3. Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.38, fols 148ᵛ–149ʳ. Reproduced with permission.
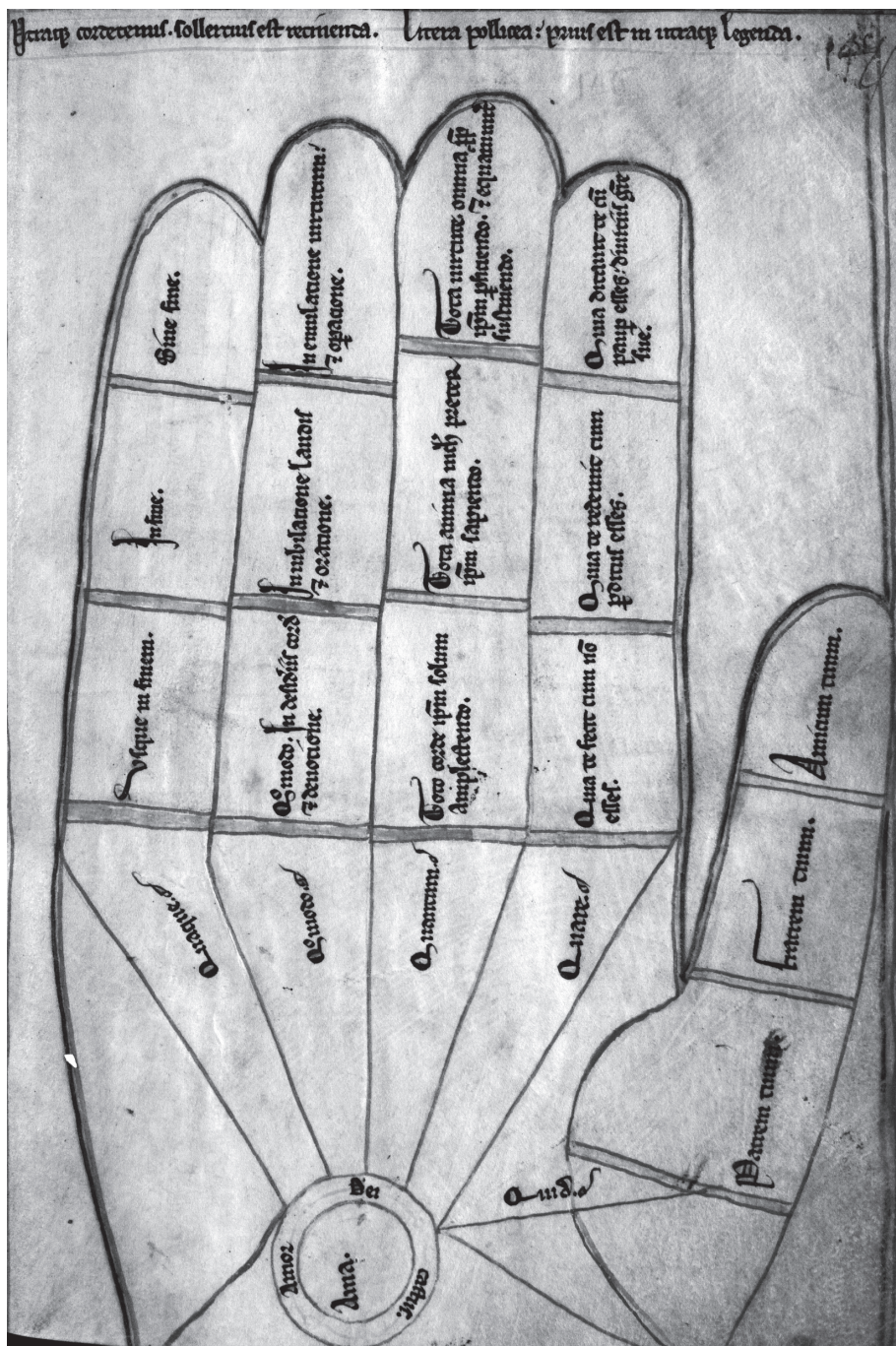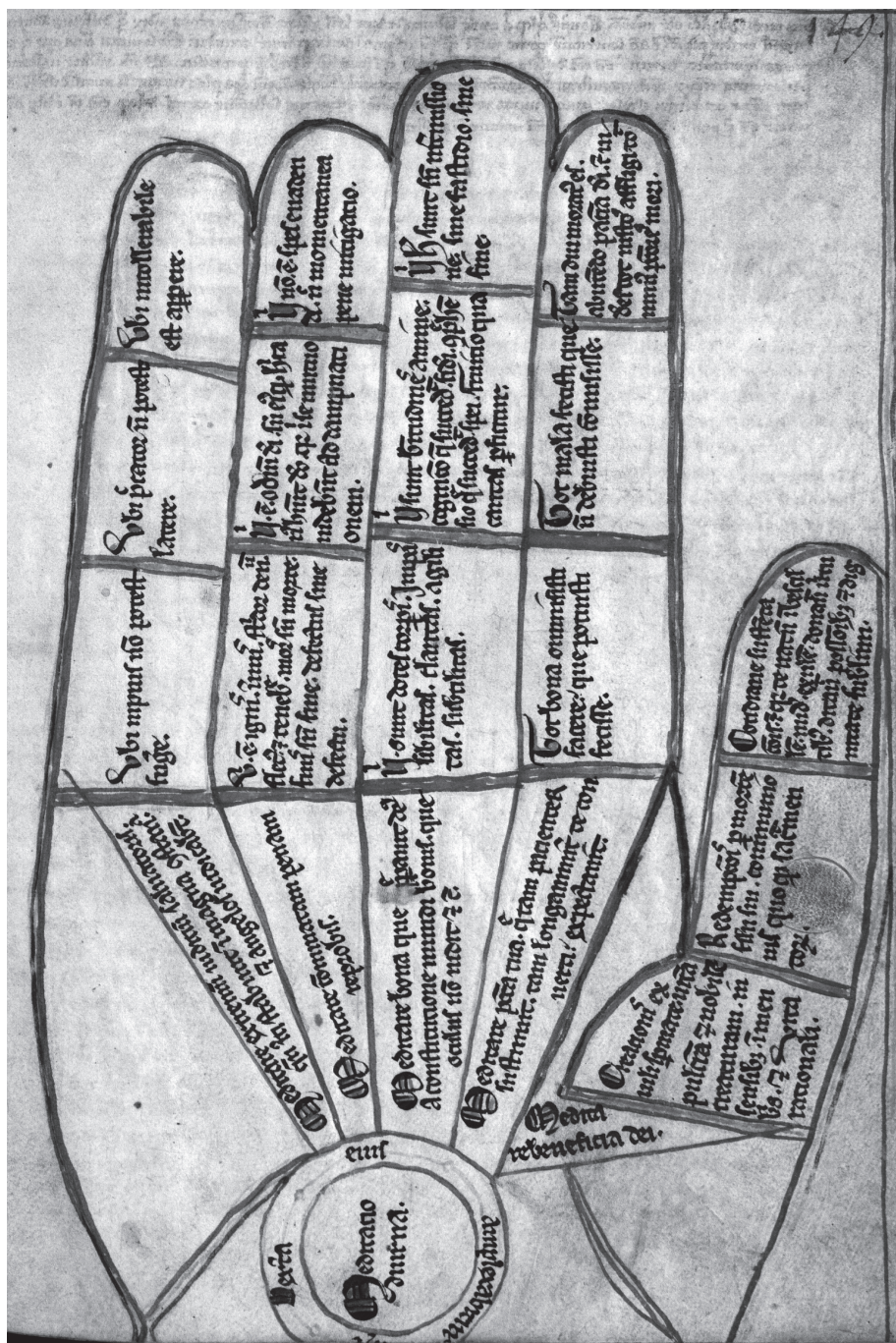
*diurna* have no reading instruction but seem to function most logically if read left to right across two hands, rather than attempting both simultaneously. If taken to begin on the left thumb, move left to right, and end at the right thumb, the *nocturna* and *diurna* mnemonics consider sins in the present life, the nature of true penitence, the certainty of death, the uncertainty of its hour and manner, and the futility of penitence after death (on the left hand, *nocturna*) as well as the Last Judgement, the suffering of the damned, the blessings of the saved, the state of the meditant's own soul, and the gifts of God (on the right hand, *diurna*). This ordering, in which death leads to judgement, which leads to a contrast between saved and damned, seems the only realistic one.

Trinity MS B.15.38, a thirteenth-century codex from the Cistercian Abbey of Hailes in Gloucestershire, is a miscellaneous collection containing mostly sermons, some erroneously attributed to Robert Grosseteste.[13] To my knowledge, the *timor* and *amor* meditations are unique to this manuscript. However, there is definite evidence that the *meditationes nocturna et diurna* circulated beyond the Cistercian Order. These meditations appear in a fourteenth-century manuscript once in the possession of the 'Harley scribe'.[14] The Harley scribe, who was probably a secular cleric with a connection to the parish church of St Laurence in Ludlow, Shropshire, compiled, copied, and annotated a number of texts between 1314 and 1328, in what is now London, British Library, MS Harley 273.[15] This collection, comprising devotional, medical, and professional administrative texts, also includes hand diagrams of the *meditationes nocturna et diurna*.[16] Furthermore, although similar to those in the Hailes manuscript, the hands in BL, MS Harley 273 contain a number of minor stylistic variations not attributable to scribal error. Two explanations are plausible. First, there may have existed a wider manuscript circulation of the *meditationes nocturna et diurna* than is currently known, allowing a cleric and legal scrivener from Ludlow to copy his images from an exemplar other than the Trinity manuscript. Alternatively, these minor variations could be the result of a tradition

[13]  King, 'The *De contemptu mundi* Attributed to Grosseteste', p. 725.

[14]  Known as such due to his connection with a different manuscript, also in the Harley collection, BL, MS Harley 2253.

[15]  Revard, 'Scribe and Provenance', pp. 21–23, 26, 58, 67–69. See also Fein, 'Compilation and Purpose in MS Harley 2253', pp. 73–75. BL, MS Harley 273 is mentioned in Talbot, 'A List of Cistercian Manuscripts in Great Britain', p. 410, because it includes *De purgatorio sancti Patricii* by Cistercian Henry of Sawtrey, but the manuscript itself does not appear to have a connection to the order.

[16]  BL, MS Harley 273, fols 110ᵛ and 112ᵛ.

of oral teaching and practice, in which the meditation was transmitted person to person and only occasionally written out in full.

The *nocturna* and *diurna* meditations share structural similarities with other meditations on death and judgement, including that found in *De institutione*, discussed in more detail below. The *Speculum novitii*, a guide for Cistercian novices possibly written by the abbot Stephen of Sawley, recommends meditating on death when going to bed, comparing the bed to a grave, and conversely contemplating the resurrection upon waking.[17] The hand meditations include similarly arranged reflections on death, judgement, and heavenly reward, with death assigned to the evening meditation and resurrection to the morning. The physical act of lying down in bed as if in the grave, and rising from it after sleep as at the bodily resurrection, seems to have made Cistercian writers think these subjects particularly suitable for certain times of day. The night meditation is assigned to the left hand, and the day to the right, with the images drawn over two facing pages, exactly matching the hands of the reader above them. The titles written on the palms, *meditatio nocturna* and *diurna*, are encircled by quotations (partially trimmed away during rebinding) from the Song of Songs 2. 6, 'leua eius sub capite [meo]' and 'dextera eius amplexabitur [me]' (his left hand is under [my] head; his right hand shall embrace [me]) (see Figure 3).[18] In the *meditatio nocturna*, beginning with the thumb, the meditant recalls that they are mortal and have used up God's patience; on the forefinger, that they do not know if they have made a full and true confession or received true penitence; on the middle finger, that death will come and cannot be deferred, nor life prolonged, and that nothing of their own can be taken with them; on the ring finger, that the hour and nature of their death is uncertain, as is their destination after death; and finally, on the little finger, that penitence is useless after death, and that whatever they leave behind will be quickly forgotten.[19]

While the *meditatio nocturna* emphasizes mortality and penitence before death, the second of this pair of meditations, the right-hand *meditatio diurna*, is concerned with judgement and the afterlife. The meditation begins with, on the little finger, an instruction to think of the Last Judgement, where the impious will be unable to flee and the sinner unable to hide. The ring finger details

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[17] Stephen of Sawley (attrib.), *Speculum Novitii*, ed. by Mikkers, xxii–xxiii. On the disputed attribution, see Sharp, 'A Treatise with Too Many Authors?', pp. 277–78. Sharp also identifies the text with another monastic treatise, known by its incipit *Deo me totum*.

[18] Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.38, fols 148ᵛ–149ʳ.

[19] Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.38, fol. 148ᵛ.

the pains and suffering of the reprobate in hell, where there is fire and worms, gnashing of teeth, weeping, and darkness. This is 'mors sine morte, finis sine fine, defectus sine defectum' (death without dying, end without ending, failure without fail), where 'non est spes euadendi, nec momentanea pene mitigatio' (there is no hope of escape, nor momentary soothing of pain). On the next finger, the blessings of heaven are recalled, including the gifts of the resurrected body (*impassibilitas*, *claritas*, *agilitas*, and *subtilitas*) and blessings of the soul which will be enjoyed without intermission and without end. The forefinger prompts an examination of conscience, calling for remembrance of all good deeds omitted and all sins. Finally, the thumb remembers God's beneficence in the act of creation and redemption through Christ's sacrifice.[20]

This double meditation draws on similar meditative stimulus to *De institutione*, pointing to the fragility of earthly existence and deliberately contrasting the suffering of the damned with the joy of the blessed in a dichotomous judgement scene. Some stylistic features are also shared with the longer texts, most notably imperative forms instructing the meditant to reflect or consider (*meditare*). Unlike the extended textual meditations, however, the form in which this programme is conveyed demonstrates its function as a guide to practice. Most obviously, the placement and orientation of the hand images on opposing pages mimic the upturned hands of the reader in the process of memorization. Such an image is clearly a mnemonic meditative aid, subdividing a large amount of information into smaller, more easily memorized segments. The hand images are visually reminiscent of the 'Guidonian hand', a system used for teaching liturgical music. Despite their visual similarity, however, these two different kinds of hand meditation have different aims and do not seem to be directly related.[21]

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[20] Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.38, fol. 149ʳ.

[21] Supposedly developed by Guido of Arezzo for music teaching in the early eleventh century, the Guidonian hand is a system in which different notes and intervals of the sol–fa scale are assigned to different parts of the hand. The advantage of the Guidonian hand to musicians is its ability to describe intervals (the distances between notes) by corresponding spatial intervals on the palm. It thus prioritizes relationships between disparate regions of the hand, and assigns notes in the form of a spiral, not left to right. The meditational hands, however, assign a separate subject to each finger, with each item to be called to mind in a very specific order. There is no system for moving suddenly from one part of the hand to another, as opposed to the intervals of the Guidonian hand. For further discussion of the Guidonian system, see Berger, 'The Guidonian Hand', p. 77; Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture*, pp. 267–69, 273–79.

It seems altogether more likely that the mnemonic hands found in Trinity MS B.15.38 emerged from within the monastic discipline of memory training. For example, the treatise on confession *De sex aliis Cherubim*, attributed to Alan of Lille, is accompanied in a manuscript from Sawley Abbey (produced *c.* 1200, around twenty years before Stephen's abbacy) by the image of a seraph. Each of the seraph's six wings symbolizes one aspect of confession, with each wing further labelled and subdivided into five feathers.[22] A similar process of memorization and meditation is evidently at work in the hand images from Hailes. Unlike the more complex seraph meditation, however — and unlike numerous other well-known examples, such as Hugh of St Victor's meditation on Noah's Ark — the hand meditations are tied to a physical form that can aid and support the meditant. Unlike the image of a seraph or the ark, whether sketched in a manuscript or constructed as an entirely internal, mental image, hands have a bodily and physical reality and maintain their presence even in the absence of the manuscript.

The benefits of using hands as the mnemonic basis for meditation are clear: almost everyone is in possession of two hands at all times, making them an almost universally accessible tool, requiring no equipment once the meditation is memorized, and available even in a total absence of light. Fingers and creases in the palm form natural divisions and subdivisions which are constant and not subject to forgetting, so any skipped steps will be easily noticed. Perhaps most importantly, hands are a mnemonic device that require little training to use (excluding the initial process of memorization). The hand images carry information about recommended use, with one meditation allocated to night-time and the other to daytime. This prescription further implies an instruction to repeat the practice daily. The mnemonic hands from Hailes thus represent a foundational step necessary to directing and producing effective self-guided meditations. Unlike Hugh of St Victor's complex, disembodied ark, which requires the meditant to imagine an intricate, three-dimensional structure in which images, ideas, or feelings are placed, the hand meditations build on the existing physical framework of the body. The hand meditations expect a certain level of self-awareness, requiring examination of, for example, one's good deeds omitted. Yet the meditative practice is still anchored in a physical object, which gives a visible, material structure and form to otherwise abstract instructions to repent sin, fear damnation, or long for the joys of heaven. The physicality of the

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[22] See Balint and Carruthers, '[Alan of Lille], *On the Six Wings of the Seraph*', p. 86. On the misidentification of the seraph as a cherub, see p. 84.

hands gives a concrete structure to an internal emotional progression, making it easier to remember and to navigate — even, perhaps, easier to feel. It seems likely, then, that the mnemonic hands from Hailes represent a regular practice of monastic meditation, probably taught orally by novice masters and only occasionally recorded in images. Extended written meditations like those of Aelred and Stephen of Sawley represent individual expansions and interpretations of these practices recorded in text and are best understood in the context of affective mnemonics.

The links between emotion and memory have been explored at length elsewhere.[23] In Trinity MS B.15.38's first pair of hand mnemonics, the connection between meditation, memory, and the cultivation of emotion is absolutely explicit. While the left hand demonstrates a meditation on fear of God (*timor Dei*), the right is devoted to his love (*amor Dei*) (see Figure 2). As in the case of the *meditationes nocturna et diurna*, a separate concept or theme is allotted to each finger, with multiple further subdivisions. Unlike the previous meditation, however, these hands are not intended to be read and recalled from left to right, but from thumb to little finger on both hands. In this way, both halves of the meditation begin with *quid* — toward whom should the emotion be directed? — on the thumb, and progress through *quare*, *quantum*, *quomodo*, and *quaque* on successive fingers.[24]

The *amor* meditation encourages reflection on God's mercy and grace. The God of the right hand is 'Patrem tuum. | Fratrem tuum. | Amicum tuum' (your father, your brother, your friend), who 'te fecit cum non esses | [...] te redemit cum perditus esses | [...] ditauit te cum pauper esses, diuitiis gratie sue' (made you when you did not exist [...] redeemed you when you were lost [...] enriched you when you were poor, with the riches of his grace). The meditant is drawn to progress from gratitude towards mystical union, 'Toto corde ipsum solum amplectendo. | Tota anima nichil preter ipsum sapiendo' (embracing him alone with your whole heart, knowing nothing besides him with your whole soul). Finally, he should be loved 'Usque in finem. | In fine. | Sine fine' (even until the end, in the end, without end).[25]

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[23] Most notable is the work of Mary Carruthers, including *The Book of Memory* and *The Craft of Thought*. See also Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories*, pp. 169–91; Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty*, pp. 62–66; Rivers, 'The Fear of Divine Vengeance', p. 67; Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p. 104.

[24] Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.38, fols 146ᵛ–147ʳ.

[25] Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.38, fol. 147ʳ.

On the other hand, the *timor* meditation emphasizes God's authority and power: 'Deum tuum | Dominum tuum | Iudicem tuum' (your God, your Lord, your Judge). The meditant must consider an omnipotent and most severe (*districtissimus*) power, whom they personally have defied and offended. The middle finger, *quantum*, prompts the meditant to fear so much 'Ut nec respirare audeas in conspectus tante maiestatis [...] Ut semper suspectus uiuas tanquam fur iam rapiendus ad tribunal iudicis' (that you dare not breathe in the sight of so much majesty [...] that you live always in apprehension, just as a thief, now snatched away to face the judge's seat). The fear of judgement, and of an all-powerful judge, is thus also associated with a physical response of restricted breathing. The ring finger, which poses the question *quare* (in what way), responds: 'Te ipsum accusando. Iudicando. Puniendo. | Aliis obtemperando. condolendo. et compaciendo. | Presentem uitam contempnendo. Futuram appetendo. Mortem non timendo' (By you accusing, judging, punishing yourself; by obeying, grieving with, and suffering with others; by despising the present life, striving for the future one, not fearing death).[26] On this finger, then, the meditant is encouraged to stir up fear first by approaching themselves and their own actions with a feeling of accusation and judgement, then by shaping their relationship with others through the painful sensations of grief and co-suffering or compassion. The final segment of the ring finger redefines or refines the *timor* of the meditation. While fear of God and judgement are positively valenced, the meditant is prompted to give a negative valence to the fear of death. The *timor* meditation carefully shapes and orients the emotion it aims to cultivate, anticipating unhelpful offshoots (such as a fear of dying) and pruning or redirecting them as efficiently as possible.

## Anselm's First Meditation

I hope to demonstrate that the images in Trinity MS B.15.38 can be contextualized within the history of monastic affective piety, with particular reference to meditations on death, judgement, and fear. In this respect, the hand mnemonics find their most notable precedent in the meditations of the Benedictine monk, later Archbishop of Canterbury and eventual saint, Anselm (*c*. 1033–1109). It is with Anselm and his works that histories of affective piety typically begin.[27]

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[26] Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.38, fol. 146ᵛ.

[27] See, for example, Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages*, pp. 234–37, 264; Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, pp. 144–46; Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition*, pp. 114–15;

In her authoritative study *From Judgment to Passion*, Rachel Fulton argues that Anselm's works represent a turning point in Christian devotion, after which a new significance was given to Christ's humanity, and the search for God was increasingly directed inward.[28] The role of emotion is crucial in achieving this transformation, and Fulton explains that Anselm's 'prayers and meditations were to be read not for their own sake, or for any particular argument that they might impart, but rather for the sake of the emotions that they were intended to stir'.[29] Anselm's first meditation, in fact — a meditation 'ad concitandum timorem', to stir up fear — offers a script for producing fear that leads to repentance, humility, and ultimately hope.[30] The meditation presents judgement and the possibility of punishment as goads to fear, and as such, it is not dissimilar to the judgement meditation found in *De institutione* and the segments of the hand mnemonics that consider the same subject. Moreover, Fulton has argued for the use of this and other meditations composed by Anselm as 'conscious mnemotechnical artifacts', emphasizing their connection to memory and memory training.[31]

The meditation begins with an examination of the reader's own sin, expressed in first person: 'Terret me vita mea. Namque diligenter discussa apparet mihi aut peccatum aut sterilitas fere tota vita mea' ('I am afraid of my life. For when I examine myself carefully, it seems to me that my whole life is either sinful or sterile').[32] The goal of such self-accusal is to awaken the sluggish soul, which sleeps in security ('anima [...] secura torpet'), to its imminent danger: 'Quid torpes, anima peccatrix? Dies iudicii venit [...]. Quid dormitas, anima tepida et digna evomi, quid dormitas? Qui non expergiscitur, qui non tremit ad tantum tonitruum, non dormit, sed mortuus est' ('Sinful soul, why are you lying still? The day of judgement is coming [...]. O man, luke-warm and worthy to be spewed out, why are you sleeping? He who does not rouse himself and tremble

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Watson, 'The Middle English Mystics', pp. 545–47. An alternative narrative centred on women's devotion is suggested by McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, pp. 58–85.

[28] Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, pp. 60, 190, 198–99.

[29] Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, p. 173.

[30] Anselm, *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem*, ed. by Schmitt, p. 76; Anselm, 'Meditation I', trans. by Ward, p. 221. See also Fulton's discussion of this meditation and the circumstances of its production, *From Judgment to Passion*, pp. 171–75.

[31] Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, p. 174.

[32] Anselm, *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem*, ed. by Schmitt, p. 76; Anselm, 'Meditation I', trans. by Ward, p. 221.

before such thunder, is not asleep but dead').[33] Creating fear is thus only the first step in this meditation, not an end in itself. Fear rouses the idle and sleeping, the *accidiosus*, the unfeeling, in order to spur them into action. It is the beginning, not the end, of wisdom.

Once awakened from their (perhaps rhetorically exaggerated) torpor, then, the reader encountering Anselm's meditation is invited to place themselves in the position of the judged. 'O lignum aridum et inutile, aeternis ignibus dignum, quid respondebis in illa die, cum exigetur a te usque ad ictum oculi omne tempus vivendi tibi impensum, qualiter fuerit a te expensum?' ('Barren and useless wood, deserving eternal burning, what reply will you make in that day when at the twinkling of an eye an account is demanded of you for all the time that has been dealt out to you? How have you expended it?')[34] Appropriate emotional reactions are helpfully modelled by the text: 'Si multa bona, pauca mala: multum gaude. Si multa mala, pauca bona: multum luge' ('If there is much good and little evil, be very glad; if there is much evil and little good, be very sorrowful').[35] Considerably more emphasis is placed on the latter case, however, and the text invites tears and groans from the meditant: 'an non sufficiunt tibi haec ad immanem rugitum? An non sufficiunt ad eliciendum sanguinem et medullas in lacrimas?' ('is [the fact that you have sinned] not sufficient to draw from you a great groan? Is it not enough to draw forth your blood and marrow in tears?').[36] As did parts of the *timor* hand mnemonic, these physical descriptors appeal to patterns of breathing — groaning, sighing — and, along with calls to tremble, relate to the performative physicality of particular emotions.[37] Fear of judgement is forced almost to the point of despair, as the sinner is instructed to add fear to fear, wailing to wailing ('adde terrorem super terrorem, ululatum super ululatum'), compounding feelings of humiliation ('contumeliam'), continual mourning ('continuandum luctum'),

[33] Anselm, *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem*, ed. by Schmitt, p. 77; Anselm, 'Meditation I', trans. by Ward, pp. 221–22.

[34] Anselm, *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem*, ed. by Schmitt, p. 77; Anselm, 'Meditation I', trans. by Ward, p. 222.

[35] Anselm, *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem*, ed. by Schmitt, p. 78; Anselm, 'Meditation I', trans. by Ward, p. 222.

[36] Anselm, *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem*, ed. by Schmitt, p. 78; Anselm, 'Meditation I', trans. by Ward, pp. 222–23.

[37] On the spiritual significance of tears in Anselm's writings, see Nagy, *Le Don des larmes au Moyen Âge*, pp. 224–26.

and spiritual agony, shading into an ambiguously physical and emotionally overwhelming terror.[38]

The key point of the meditation is the transition from this intense and pressing *timor Dei* to something beyond and outside it. This movement of transcendence is achieved through a series of questions, prompting the reader to interrogate their own response.

> O angustiae! Hinc erunt accusantia peccata, inde terrens iustitia; subtus patens horridum chaos inferni, desuper iratus iudex; intus urens conscientia, foris ardens mundus. Iustus vix salvabitur, peccator sic deprehensus in quam partem se premet? Constrictus ubi latebo, quomodo parebo? Latere erit impossibile, apparere intolerabile. [...] Quid erit tunc? Quis eruet de manibus dei? Unde mihi consilium, unde salus? Quis est qui dicitur magni consilii angelus, qui dicitur salvator, ut nomen eius vociferer?[39]

> [Alas for me, here are sins accusing me — there is the terror of judgement. Below the horrible chaos of hell lies open — above is the wrath of the judge. Inside is the burning of conscience — outside is the burning of the world. Scarcely shall the just be saved, — and thus overtaken, where can a sinner turn? I am bound fast, where shall I turn? How can I show myself? It will be impossible to hide, it will be intolerable to appear. [...] What will happen then? Who will deliver me out of the hands of God? Where shall I find counsel, where safety? Who is he who is called Angel of mighty counsel, who is called Saviour, that I may call upon his name?][40]

At the very moment of judgement, in the midst of apparent doom, the text's careful questioning directs the meditant's gaze towards a beacon of hope. When fear can no longer be endured, it is transformed — in a deeply Christian sublimation — into hope, delight, and love. At last, the meditant can breathe: 'Respira iam, o peccator; respira, ne desperes' (Breathe now, o sinner; breathe, do not despair).[41] This moment of transition is critical to understanding the meditation as an emotional script. As an affective tool, fear of God is not here intended to make meditants despair, and its ultimate aim is not just to make them afraid. Rather, fear is a first step towards repentance, in firm hope of salvation. In this conception, *amor Dei* proceeds naturally from *timor Dei*, and each strengthens and affirms the other. Removing all doubt, the meditation at last confirms: 'Iam ipse est, iam ipse est Jesus. [...] Spera in eo quem times. Affuge

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[38] Anselm, *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem*, ed. by Schmitt, p. 78.

[39] Anselm, *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem*, ed. by Schmitt, pp. 78–79.

[40] Anselm, 'Meditation I', trans. by Ward, pp. 223–24.

[41] Anselm, *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem*, ed. by Schmitt, p. 79 (my translation).

ad eum a quo aufugisti' ('But it is he himself, he himself is Jesus. [...] Hope in him whom you fear, flee to him from whom you have fled').[42] As hope emerges from despair, so too does love emerge from fear.

Anselm's meditation draws on a variety of stylistic features, some of them specifically rhetorical, to encourage engaged, meditative reading. As Sarah McNamer has noted, these features recur across a range of meditative devotional texts and are indicative of texts designed as 'intimate scripts' for the performance of emotion. While Anselm makes use of a psalmic 'I', allowing the reader to inhabit the first person and use the text as a scripted monologue, the hand mnemonics and the next meditation considered here, from Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum*, tend to use imperative verb forms that instruct the meditant to imagine, feel, or reflect. Regardless of strategy, though — whether the reader is addressed directly, or invited to take the position of first-person supplicant — all these meditations aim to produce particular emotions in response to scenes of judgement through a practice of reflective imagining.

## De institutione inclusarum

*De institutione inclusarum* (*c.* 1160–62), composed by the Cistercian Aelred during his abbacy of Rievaulx, is well known as a guide for anchorites. Purportedly responding to a request from his sister, Aelred provides instruction and guidance to help those living a religious life in the absence of a monastic rule. As a meditative guide, however, *De institutione* was also recommended to Cistercian novices, and thus seems to have had a relatively wide audience, both male and female, monastic and anchoritic.[43] The advice in Aelred's text is divided into instructions concerning external behaviour — including advice on whether to receive visitors, fasting, silence, and how many servants to keep — and guidance regarding the anchorite's internal, spiritual life. This second, inner rule is largely comprised of a 'triple meditation' dwelling on past events (the life of Christ), present advantages (such as spiritual and physical health), and future outcomes (the Last Judgement). It also includes a number of shorter meditations on virtues such as *caritas*. Drawing on Augustinian ideas of sensory perception, Aelred's guide provides both practical instruction for overcoming distracting temporal stimuli perceived by the external or bodily senses,

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[42]  Anselm, *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem*, ed. by Schmitt, p. 79; Anselm, 'Meditation I', trans. by Ward, p. 224.

[43]  Stephen of Sawley (attrib.), *Speculum novitii*, ed. by Mikkers, p. 52.

and food for the internal spiritual senses, which are the anchorite's sole means of experiencing the divine.[44]

The triple meditation begins, then, with an extended meditation on events from Christ's life, culminating in the Passion. Regarding this gospel meditation, Michelle Karnes notes the level of imaginative freedom given to the reader, who 'is fully part of the scenes she imagines [...] and can both act and elicit a countervailing response from Jesus'.[45] Far from being constrained to the gospel scenes, the same high level of imaginative involvement is encouraged and even expected in the meditations on present and future events that follow. *De institutione*'s meditation on the present can be broadly characterized as an incitement to gratitude for one's own well-being — spiritual as well as physical — and the extension of *caritas* towards those less fortunate, including the destitute and those undergoing temptation. The shortest of the three meditations, the reflection on the present includes the same features of emotional exhortation and direct address to the reader that characterize intimate scripts and that are similarly found in the past and future meditations which bracket it.

The final meditation, on future events, is an account of the Last Judgement. 'Iam nunc diei illius intuere terrorem', Aelred instructs, 'quando uirtutes caelorum mouebuntur, elementa ignis calore soluentur, patebunt inferi, occulta omnia nudabuntur' (Now, look upon the terror of that day, when the heavenly powers will be set in motion, the elements will be destroyed by the heat of fire, the lower world will be opened, all secrets will be bared).[46] When the omniscient Judge comes forth and the angels begin to separate the sinners from the just, the reader is invited to participate personally in the events: 'Cogita nunc, te ante Christi tribunal inter utramque hanc societatem assistere, et necdum in partem alteram separatam' (Now imagine you stand before Christ's judgement seat, surrounded by this community, and not yet separated into either part).[47] Participation is thus signposted by an imperative and a transition to the present tense, encouraging the meditant to collaborate with the text in creating an emotionally charged judgement scene.

The meditation develops in a similar way to those on past and present events which precede it. It includes sensory language, makes frequent reference to

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[44] Bourke, 'An Experiment in "Neurohistory"', pp. 134–35.

[45] Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition*, p. 121.

[46] Aelred, *De institutione inclusarum*, ed. by Hoste and Talbot, p. 678. Where no English language reference is given, translations are my own.

[47] Aelred, *De institutione inclusarum*, ed. by Hoste and Talbot, p. 678.

the eyes (implicitly the inner eye, as the anchorite is not physically witnessing events as she reads), instructs the anchorite to think on or contemplate events (*cogita*, *contemplare*), and gives prompts that serve as cues for a particular emotional response (*horror*, *felicitas*, *timor*):

> Deflecte nunc oculos ad sinistram iudicis, et miseram illam multitudinem contemplare. Qualis ibi horror, quis foetor, quis timor, quis dolor? […] Retorque nunc ad dexteram oculos et quibus te glorificando sit inserturus aduerte. Quis ibi decor, quis honor, quae felicitas, quae securitas? […] Sta nunc quasi in medio, nesciens quibus te iudicis sententia deputabit. O dura expectatio! Timor et tremor uenerunt super me.[48]

> [Now turn your eyes to the left of the Judge, and contemplate that wretched multitude. What kind of horror is there, what stench, what fear, what pain? […] Now turn back your eyes to the right and look at those amongst whom you will be placed when you are glorified. What beauty is there, what honour, what happiness, what security? […] Stand now as if in the middle, not knowing to which the Judge's verdict will allot you. Oh cruel waiting! Fear and trembling came over me.]

The judgement meditation thus allows the anchorite to recreate artificially a particular kind of emotional tension, in this case produced through feelings of suspense, dread, fear, and perhaps also hope and desire for glory. The meditation encourages emotional contrast, with fear and suffering on one hand and glory, beauty, and happiness on the other. Standing in the middle of these two states, the meditant can turn from one to the other repeatedly, rehearsing or witnessing the affective responses modelled by the text.

This tension is resolved when the judgement at last occurs, with a (perhaps predictably) positive result for Aelred's sister, who joins the ranks of the blessed ('Iam te puta sanctae illi societati coniunctam').[49] As is the case of devotional meditation more generally, including Passion meditation, an awareness of the inevitable outcome of events — it is extremely likely, at least in terms of subjects for meditation, that the anchorite will end up saved rather than damned — does not prohibit this rehearsal of emotional tension followed by resolution. Although Aelred suggests that full understanding of God's kingdom cannot be realized until meditation becomes reality and the events of the Last Judgement actually occur, the process of creating and alleviating anxiety must have inspired desire for the heavenly kingdom, as well as strengthening the

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[48] The striking change to first person in the final line is due to Aelred quoting directly from Psalms. *De institutione inclusarum*, ed. by Hoste and Talbot, pp. 678–79.

[49] Aelred, *De institutione inculsarum*, ed. by Hoste and Talbot, p. 679.

anchorite's emotional attachment to it. For Aelred, as for Anselm, the value of these meditations lay in their emotional content: 'habes in triplici meditatione quomodo in te Dei dilectionem excites, nutrias et accendas' (in this triple meditation, you have a means by which you may rouse, nourish, and inflame love of God in yourself ).[50]

Aelred and Anselm are often discussed together, with both authors considered — justifiably — to be key figures in the evolution of affective piety.[51] Their works, along with those of writers like Bernard of Clairvaux, James of Milan, and Richard Rolle, have formed the key objects of study for historians of devotion, mysticism, and affect. Overwhelmingly, research has focused on extended passages of prose. It should be clear from the hand mnemonics, however, that meditations were not always practised or recorded in an extended prose format. Despite drawing on similar subject matter — death and judgement — for similar emotional aims, the hand mnemonics represent a very different format from Aelred and Anselm's meditations. This is all the more striking given the underlying structural similarities, particularly between the hands and *De institutione*, both of which emerged from a Cistercian tradition. The judgement scene in *De institutione* is structured as a binary opposition, with the meditant suspended between suffering on the one hand, as it were, and ultimate happiness on the other. There are clear parallels here with Trinity MS B.15.38. Although the *nocturna* and *diurna* mnemonics do not divide into damnation on the left and salvation on the right, they create a similar contrast between the pains of the reprobate (recounted in detail on the ring finger of the right hand) and their counterparts, the blessings of the redeemed (listed immediately afterward, on the right middle finger). As in *De institutione*, the index finger then invites the meditant to reflect on their own uncertain position between the two — good deeds left undone, sins committed and patiently borne by Christ. The *timor* and *amor* hands are also structurally similar to *De institutione* in their deliberate contrast of two opposing but mutually necessary emotional extremes, this time (as in *De institutione*) assigned simply to left and right.

We are left, therefore, with a substantial difference of format (though not necessarily of structure or subject) between more frequently studied extended prose meditations and the largely visual, diagrammatic, obviously mnemonic hand images. One meditation, or series of meditations, which may help reconcile these formats and reveal their connections more clearly is the *Meditationes*

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[50] Aelred, *De institutione inclusarum*, ed. by Hoste and Talbot, p. 682.

[51] See above, note 27.

*de gaudiis beatae et gloriosae semper virginis Mariae* (hereafter *MGBM*). As their name suggests, these meditations deal not with fear and judgement, but with the joys of the Virgin. The structure of the text is mnemonic; like the hands, it is divided into easily numbered, easily remembered segments. In form, however, it resembles a more structured version of the extended prose meditations already considered, and its subject matter is similarly devotional and affective.

## *Meditationes de gaudiis beatae et gloriosae semper virginis Mariae*

The *MGBM*, composed in the first half of the thirteenth century by the Cistercian abbot Stephen of Sawley, contains a series of fifteen short meditations on the joys of the Virgin Mary in chronological order.[52] The joys range from the conception of the Christ-child to his Passion and Crucifixion, concluding with a description of the heavenly Jerusalem following the Virgin's assumption into heaven. The text begins by explaining the purpose of the meditations, which the author suggests were written at the request of a fellow brother. Stephen suggests that the unknown recipient requested meditations in writing 'per que memoria tua possit excitari et exercitari in amore eiusdem beatissime uirginis' ('through which [his] mind can be roused and activated in the love of this most blessed Virgin').[53] The text thus explicitly seeks to excite or arouse a particular emotion, *amor*, through the faculty of *memoria*.

The fifteen short meditations or joys are separated by the author into sets of five, each followed by a pause (*pausatio*) allowing the reader brief respite from meditative exertion. The first set of five joys expounds Mary's virtues and biblical events before the birth of Christ, including the Annunciation and Mary's meeting with Elizabeth. The second set includes the Nativity and events from Christ's life in which his mother played a role, such as the miracle of the marriage at Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine at her request. The final set contains the Crucifixion (which the author insists is also a 'joy' for Mary) and subsequent events, concluding with a description of the Virgin's coronation as queen of heaven. As well as this division into three sets, each of the individual fifteen steps is also divided into three sections: a meditation (*medita-*

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[52] For details on attribution, the seven surviving manuscript copies, and the text's relationship to later practices (including the Hours of the Virgin), see Wilmart, 'Les Méditations d'Étienne de Sallai', pp. 376–91.

[53] Stephen of Sawley, *Meditationes de gaudiis beate et gloriose semper uirginis Marie*, ed. by Wilmart, p. 392; *Meditations*, trans. by O'Sullivan, pp. 27–28.

*tio*), describing the circumstances and context of a particular emotion; a joy (*gaudium*), in which the imagined emotion is specifically attached to the figure of the Virgin; and a petition (*petitio*), during which the meditant asks whether they might participate in Mary's emotional experience. Each *petitio* ends with a variation on the first half of the *Ave Maria*, praising Mary and emphasizing her role as Mother of God.

The structure of the *MGBM* is indisputably formulaic and repetitive. Yet what has been considered a defect from an aesthetic perspective is a virtue in terms of memorization and emotional training.[54] In each of the fifteen steps, the *MGBM* encourages the meditant, first, to imagine an emotionally charged scene; second, to identify the specific cause of joy within that scene and how it relates to Mary; and finally, to participate in the Virgin's joy. The first step in this process involves imagining an abstract feeling or emotion in the broadest sense of the word as defined above. A scene of a particular moral quality, coloured with associated emotions, is evoked. These initial states are then frequently subject to a pivotal movement or transformation. Thus the first meditation begins:

> Cogita in quali miseria mundus constitutus fuit, cum mors regnaret ab Adam usque ad Christum, cum peccatum preuaricationis dominaretur in mundo et omnes obuolueret tenebris ignorancie et desperationis [...]. Sic igitur sedentibus in tenebris et umbra mortis, quasi aurora consurgens ex tenebris, quasi stella matutina in medio nebule orta est uirgo Maria, que spem salutis attulit et tenebras depulit.[55]

> [Ponder on the wretched state of the world from the days of Adam until the coming of Christ when death reigned, when sin and evil held sway over the earth, enshrouding all mankind in the darkness of ignorance [...]. But then, to those who were sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, the Virgin Mary came forth as does daylight out of darkness and as does the morning star out of dawn; she brought salvation and dispelled the darkness and the clouds.][56]

The transition described here is both an affective movement from despair into hope and grace, and a series of physical sensations — cold to warm, dark to

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[54] Wilmart, for example, does not rate Stephen's literary skills highly, remarking only that 'Notre auteur ne peut être compté non plus parmi les écrivains de marquee [... mais] si l'on veut prendre la peine de le lire avec attention, ne mérite pas le dédain'. 'Les Méditations d'Étienne de Sallai', p. 373.

[55] Stephen of Sawley, *Meditationes de gaudiis beate et gloriose semper uirginis Marie*, ed. by Wilmart, p. 393.

[56] Stephen of Sawley, *Meditations*, trans. by O'Sullivan, p. 29.

light. The *meditatio* grounds emotions in physicality, instructing the meditant to 'Forma igitur in animo tuo rerum circumstancias, scilicet quam grata, quam graciosa fuerit spes desperatis, salus languidis, lux constitutis in tenebris, liberacio squalore carceris oppressis' ('Form in your mind a picture of this situation. See how this welcome event brought grace and hope to those who had lost hope, deliverance to those who had lost heart, light to those living in darkness, and freedom to those oppressed in a dark prison').[57] In each meditation, the first section (*meditatio*) involves the formation of a mental image or imagined experience with a strong emotive component, such as the Annunciation, the birth of Christ, and the Assumption.

Following the *meditatio*, the *gaudium* section of each meditation serves to fix the affective qualities conjured by the meditant more firmly to the figure of the Virgin. This is accomplished grammatically by a transition from third-person descriptive passages framed by emotional imperatives ('think of a scene …') to a direct address to the figure of Mary herself ('rejoice, Virgin …'). The first *gaudium* thus begins with an imperative instruction to the Virgin — *gaude* — the same imperative that signals the beginning of each *gaudium* throughout the series.

> Gaude, gloriosissima dei genitrix et sanctissima uirgo semper Maria, que sanctissima natiuitate tua gaudium annunciasti uniuerso mundo. Annunciasti enim animabus in inferno liberationem, hominibus in terra saluationem, angelis in celo gloriam et superne ciuitatis sue reedificationem.[58]

> [Rejoice, O most glorious Mother of God, Mary most holy and ever-virgin, because your birth brought joyful tidings to the whole world. To the souls in purgatory you brought liberation; to men on earth, salvation; to the angels in heaven, glory; and to the heavenly city, restoration.][59]

What was initially a general or abstract set of sensations — the transition from darkness to light of the *meditatio* — is reified by the *gaudium* into a specific figure. The experience of joy becomes concretized in the form of the Virgin. What was previously situational — involving Mary and emanating from Mary, but also permeating the context around her — is now concentrated into her exclu-

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[57] Stephen of Sawley, *Meditationes de gaudiis beate et gloriose semper uirginis Marie*, ed. by Wilmart, p. 394; *Meditations*, trans. by O'Sullivan, p. 30.

[58] Stephen of Sawley, *Meditationes de gaudiis beate et gloriose semper uirginis Marie*, ed. by Wilmart, p. 394.

[59] Stephen of Sawley, *Meditations*, trans. by O'Sullivan, p. 30.

sively, as her property and her gift to distribute. Where the meditant was previously co-author, constructing an image as instructed by the text, their position in the *gaudium* becomes that of an interlocutor, addressing Mary directly, as if speaking through the text.

This process, enrobing an emotion in the imagined flesh of the Virgin, thus leads the reader to the third stage of the meditation, the *petitio*. In this section, the meditant requests that the Virgin share with them the joy now embodied within her.

> Rogo ergo te, dulcissima domina, per prerogatiuam gaudii huius, quatinus in memoria sanctissime natiuitatis tue miseram et tenebrosam conscienciam meam illuminare digneris luce spiritualis desiderii ut, abiectis tenebris temporalis uanitatis, te subueniente merear gaudia lucis ueritatis, o clemens, o pia, o dulcis Maria.[60]

> [Sweet Lady, by the prerogative of this Joy, that is, the memory of your holy birth, enkindle my weak and confused mind with the light of spiritual desires, so that having cast aside the darkness of worldly pride, I may, through your intercession, be the recipient of the joys accruing from the vision of the eternal truth. O clement, O loving, O sweet Mary.][61]

An emotion produced by the discipline of meditation is here reconstructed as a gift from an external being. Mary's gift of joy to the meditant also offers a symbolic parallel to her gift of Christ to the world, bringing forth hope and salvation. In this way, the meditation on the fifteen joys allows the meditant repeatedly to move from the position of a reader being instructed to feel — the emotional imperatives of the *meditatio* — to an inhabited, psalmic first person (seen also in Anselmian meditation) as they voice their *petitio* directly to the Virgin Mary.

This basic structure underpins each of the fifteen meditations, often in an explicitly repetitive way. Each *gaudium*, for example, begins with the same formulaic phrase, 'Gaude, gloriosissima dei genetrix et sanctissima uirgo semper Maria' ('Rejoice, O most glorious Mother of God, Mary most holy and ever-virgin'). Each *petitio* ends with a similarly formulaic recital of the *Ave Maria*, with very little variation. This repetition, along with the segmented structure of the *MGBM*, makes it ideal for memorization. On the first level, the movement through *meditatio-gaudium-petitio* is easily recalled, and provides the fundamental unit of meditation. On the next level up, the division of the joys into

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[60] Stephen of Sawley, *Meditationes de gaudiis beate et gloriose semper uirginis Marie*, ed. by Wilmart, p. 394.

[61] Stephen of Sawley, *Meditations*, trans. by O'Sullivan, p. 30.

three groups of five also provides convenient segments for memorization that roughly correspond to chronological periods in the life of the Virgin — before Christ's birth, during his life, his death and resurrection. This breaking down of large amounts of information into smaller, manageable chunks suggests that, like the hand diagrams, the *MGBM* was composed with a mnemonic function in mind.

## Conclusion

All these meditations, then, offer readers an opportunity to generate emotional responses to remembered/imagined events and actions, whether in a biblical past, a material present, or a projected eschatological future. Whereas Anselm's prayers and meditations and Aelred's anchoritic guide will be familiar to many, the *MGBM* and certainly the hand diagrams are outside the usual canon of affective devotional works. Moreover, their format may be unfamiliar for those used to working exclusively with extended free prose. However, it is only by viewing these formats together that we can understand the spectrum of monastic meditative practice, which ranged from portable mnemonics, through meditations based on a series of easily recalled steps or stages, to finally the fully realized extended works of monastic authors, difficult to reproduce exactly without reference to a manuscript. To conclude, I will suggest (based on admittedly limited evidence) that these or similar practices coexisted, and that extended prose meditations arose from more segmented mnemonic practices. Others may wish to construct an alternative theory, in which extended meditations are condensed and distilled over time, perhaps as a result of changes in confessional practice and new methods of structuring other religious works such as sermons. The crucial factor, however, is the connection of extended prose to other types of meditation, regardless of which direction influence is seen to flow.

As far as the hands are concerned, the question of use and audience remains. How widespread was the use of these meditations, and was it exclusively Cistercian? At this point, such a question is impossible to answer in full. It is my hypothesis that similar (if not identical) mnemonic meditation techniques were taught orally in many Cistercian houses throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, perhaps by the novice master.[62] Mnemonics, however, is a difficult discipline to teach at a distance, as anyone who has attempted to learn

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[62] Aelred held this position at Rievaulx; see Daniel, *Vita Ailredi*, ed. and trans. by Powicke, pp. 23–27. Stephen, although not a novice master, may have composed the *Speculum novitii*, a 'mirror for novices'.

the techniques described in memory treatises will attest. Far easier, then, to respond to requests from a non-Cistercian woman (Aelred's sister) or a far-off brother (Stephen's recipient) with an already expanded form of a habitual meditation. Nevertheless, by the first half of the fourteenth century at least one person beyond the Cistercian Order — the Harley scribe — had detailed diagrams in his possession that demonstrated how an affective meditation practice could be constructed through memory training. By the fifteenth century, BL, MS Harley 273 was in the possession of a London apothecary, John Clerk, though whether he ever used the hand meditations is unknown.[63] Thus, although more complex mnemonic techniques may have remained an exclusively monastic orthopraxis for at least a period, more general strategies of emotional experimentation began to be disseminated considerably earlier through extended text-based reconstructions.

It is possible, of course, to interpret the meditative hands as condensed versions of the kind of emotional experiment recorded at greater length in well-known texts of twelfth-century mystics. It seems more likely, though, that the hands represent a foundational element of monastic training: cultivating emotions such as fear and love of God through regular reflection on past and future events, a practice facilitated by memory training. Events like the Last Judgement were expanded, inhabited, and explored in regular — even daily — meditation practice. When such explorations were recorded in text, they became the intimate scripts with which historians are more familiar, including some of the writings of Anselm, Aelred, and the lesser-known Stephen of Sawley. If these writings constitute intimate scripts for the performance of emotion, identifiable by generic features such as emotional imperatives and direct address to the reader, then the hand mnemonics could perhaps be considered as prompts for emotional improvization. All these meditations provide a space in which affective responses to particular stimuli can be induced, probed, strengthened, corrected, and reinforced through a process of repeated and ongoing emotional experimentation.

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[63] Revard, 'Scribe and Provenance', p. 82.

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# Bonaventure's Thought Experiment: The Use of *Synderesis* in the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, the Ineffability Topos, and Francis's Stigmata

Gustav Zamore

## Introduction

Scholastic thinkers are often examined on the unstated assumption that they rarely changed their way of thinking. In some cases, such as that of Bonaventure, such a reputation is undeserved. In his study of Bonaventure's theology, Etienne Gilson made the assumption that there was no substantial change in the Franciscan theologian's thought in over two decades of writing.[1] While it may be true that the fundamental aspects of Bonaventure's theology remained largely fixed, as they were for Aquinas, this position easily obscures the fact that he was capable of radically rethinking some important concepts.

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[1] Gilson, *The Philosophy of St Bonaventure*, p. 35. Gilson emphasizes that the *Commentary on the Sentences* contained the main outlines of his future work, while still acknowledging that there was an evolution in his thought. This sentiment was echoed in a recent overview of Bonaventure's thought as a reason for not following a chronological order of exposition; cf. Cullen, *Bonaventure*, where the author chooses to analyse his material following Bonaventure's own thematic division of human knowledge, adding his agreement with Gilson that 'there is little, if any, substantial development in Bonaventure's thinking' (p. xii).

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One such concept that underwent radical changes was the concept of *synderesis*. This concept is known among historians of philosophy and theology as the power of the soul (*vis* or *potentia animae*), or alternatively, as a habit of the intellect (*habitus*), that helps it to grasp the principles of natural law. It was thought to be innate and therefore present in all human beings, even in sinners as reprobate as Cain. Its function in medieval moral psychology was to provide the major premises of moral reasoning (e.g., 'All evil must be avoided', 'God must be obeyed', and so on) which conscience then applied to a particular situation. Other scholastics, such as Bonaventure, interpreted it as the *desire* to seek the good that had been grasped by the intellect.[2] Surprisingly, however, *synderesis* was also occasionally applied in mystical texts, where it was conceived of as a supra-rational force that unites the soul to God. In the following, I will refer to the moral-psychological understanding of *synderesis* as *synderesis*[α] and to the mystical understanding of it as *synderesis*[β], in the cases when it is necessary to distinguish between them.

This chapter first examines the shifting uses of *synderesis* in the writings of Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1217/21–1274), who went from using *synderesis*[α] in his *Commentary on the Sentences* (*c*. 1252), to *synderesis*[β] in his most famous mystical treatise, the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (*c*. 1259).[3] This change in usage, I argue, is an extension of his discussion in the *Commentary*, but it also reflects the synthesis between scholasticism and mysticism that permeates the entire *Itinerarium*. I then demonstrate how Bonaventure's use of *synderesis*[β] functions in relation to the ineffability topos in the final chapter of the *Itinerarium*. Finally, I show how *synderesis* relates to the central image of the *Itinerarium*: Francis's mystical ecstasy and reception of the stigmata. The aim of the chapter is to highlight the mutability of scholastic thought by showing how Bonaventure 'experimented' with his concepts and how that experimentation influenced Bonaventure's way of articulating the ineffability topos within a Franciscan context in the face of the harsh criticism directed against the Franciscan Order and the cult of St Francis during the 1250s.

Bonaventure's changing use of *synderesis* makes him stand out from his fellow thirteenth-century scholastic masters and can be called an ongoing

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[2] See e.g. Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy*. The second volume of Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XII*ᵉ *et XIII*ᵉ *siècles* remains the indispensable sourcebook for many still unedited sources on *synderesis*. For an overview of the history of the concept, see also Solignac, 'Synderesis'; Appel, *Die Lehre der Scholastiker*; and Stelzenberger, *Syneidesis, Conscientia, Gewissen*.

[3] The year of Bonaventure's birth is still somewhat uncertain; 1217 and 1221 are often given as the likely years of his birth. For a summary of the problem, see Cullen, *Bonaventure*, pp. 8–9.

'thought experiment' in the sense that he appears to try out different inter-
pretations of *synderesis* to fit each text. The setting of one of these texts, the
*Itinerarium*, is Francis of Assisi's reception of the stigmata at Mount La Verna.
This is a scene that gives Bonaventure the imaginary space in which he can envi-
sion how one interpretation of *synderesis* functions — as the power that brings
about the mystical experience of Francis. Bonaventure, therefore, does not only
experiment with his concepts, he also creates, to paraphrase Jonathan Morton's
introduction to this volume, a scenario which may or may not be achievable in
reality, and which illustrates a particular philosophical and theological prin-
ciple — the possibility of mystical union. The *Itinerarium* shows the way to
mystical union, and *synderesis*, as Bonaventure understands it there, is the key
to that union. With this text, Bonaventure invites the reader to imagine, and
even to experience, how *synderesis* functions, rather than engaging in a formal
definition of the concept.

## From Jerome to Bonaventure

The term *synderesis* is likely a corruption of Jerome's use of the word *syneidesis*
(the Greek term for conscience) in his commentary on Ezekiel's vision of four
creatures — a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle.[4]

> Plerique, iuxta Platonem, rationale animae et irascentiuum et concupiscentiuum,
> quod ille λογικὸν et θυμικὸν et ἐπιθυμητικὸν uocat, ad hominem et leonem ac uitu-
> lum referunt […] quartumque ponunt quae super haec et extra haec tria est, quam
> graeci uocant συνείδησιν — quae scintilla conscientiae in Cain quoque pectore,
> postquam eiectus est de paradiso, non extinguitur, et qua victi voluptatibus uel
> furore, ipsaque interdum rationis decepti similitudine, nos peccare sentimus.[5]

> [Many, following Plato, relate the rational part of the soul, the emotional and appe-
> titive — what he called *logikon*, *thymikon*, and *epithymetikon* — to the man, the
> lion and the ox […] and they add a fourth which is placed above and beyond these
> three, which the Greeks call *syneidesis*, that spark of conscience which was not even
> extinguished in Cain after he was thrown out of Paradise. And through this power

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[4] Cf. Ezekiel 1. 4–12. Aimé Solignac suggests that two readings, *syneidesis* and *synteresis*,
are the result of the fact that Jerome wrote the first two books two times. Solignac, 'Synderesis',
col. 1408. Jacques de Blic, on the other hand, suggests that *syneidesis* became *synteresis/synderesis*
around the time of Anselm of Laon; see de Blic, 'Syndérèse ou conscience?'. See also Tardieu,
'*Psychaios spinther*'.

[5] Jerome, *Commentariorum in Hiezechielem*, ed. by Glorie, pp. 11–12.

we understand that we have sinned, after having been overcome by desires or wrath (sometimes under the appearance of rationality).]

*Syneidesis* as a 'spark of conscience' (*scintilla conscientiae*), that part of human nature uncontaminated by sin, is situated above the three parts of the soul — reason (*logikon*), emotion (*thymikon*), and appetite (*epithymetikon*) — and, like a soaring eagle, keeps watch over them.[6] Although Peter Lombard does not mention the term *synderesis* explicitly in his *Sentences*, the thirty-ninth distinction of the second book contains a reference to Jerome's commentary.[7] With this reference, the future of *synderesis*[α] in academic discussions was secured: as long as the *Sentences* remained the standard textbook and subject of academic commentaries, *synderesis*[α] would survive as a concept and be applied to new questions as they arose.

The term *synderesis* also appears outside of scholastic discussions of moral psychology. In the writings of Thomas Gallus (*c.* 1200–1246), the Victorine abbot of Sant' Andrea in Vercelli, *synderesis* functions as a mystical force of union (i.e. *synderesis*[β]), by which the soul is ineffably united to God.[8] Gallus uses the term *synderesis scintilla* — a spark of *synderesis*, which is treated more or less synonymously with terms such as *apex mentis* (summit of the mind), *apex affectus*, and *apex affectionis* (summit of the affect), thus signifying that *synderesis*[β] represents the highest point of the mind, which unites it to God. In this terminology, *synderesis*, a third-declension noun with identical nominative and genitive cases, takes the genitive. This notion of a spark of *synderesis* appears not to be directly related to the notion of *synderesis* as a spark of conscience. In Jerome's text, *synderesis* itself was the spark of conscience, but what Gallus writes about is the spark of *synderesis*. The spark, in a way, represents the intuitive knowledge of God or the good.

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[6] Bell, 'The Tripartite Soul and the Image of God in the Latin Tradition'; Kries, 'Origen, Plato and Conscience ("Synderesis") in Jerome's Ezekiel Commentary'.

[7] Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, ii d. 39. c. 3.3. Lombard's discussion focuses on why it is that a person sins, while still desiring the good. At the end of his discussion, he writes: 'Superior enim scintilla rationis, quae etiam, ut ait Hieronymus, in Cain non potuit extingui, bonum semper vult et malum odit' (The spark of higher reason, as Jerome writes, cannot be extinguished in Cain; it always desires the good and detests evil).

[8] An overview and analysis of Gallus's mystical vocabulary can be found in Lawell, '*Ne de ineffabili penitus taceamus*'. Bernard McGinn points out that Thomas was probably the first to use *synderesis* in its mystical sense. McGinn, 'Thomas Gallus and Dionysian Mysticism', p. 88, n. 26.

As Declan Lawell has noted, the notion of a spark of *synderesis*[β], or a summit of the soul, means that the soul pierces through the chasm between the world and God, but must in the end be a recipient of God's grace, which 'ignites' it and allows a spark (*scintilla*) to rise from it, through which the soul can be united with God.[9] *Synderesis*[β] thus primarily refers to the human aspect of the journey to God, but it only emits its spark when actuated by God. No amount of human effort (*industria*) can therefore bring it to its full potential.

## *Bonaventure's Development of* Synderesis *from the* Commentary on the Sentences *to the* Itinerarium

In the thirty-ninth distinction of the second book of the *Commentary on the Sentences*, (*c*. 1252) Bonaventure says, somewhat resignedly, that there is diversity of opinion among the masters regarding the powers of the soul. In discussing *synderesis*[α], he navigates between the views of his teachers, primarily Alexander of Hales and John of La Rochelle, as well as previous masters, such as William of Auxerre and Philip the Chancellor. Unlike these authors, Bonaventure emphasizes that *synderesis*[α] is not so much a cognitive power of the soul as an affective power which compels the soul to seek the moral good (*bonum honestum*). In an inversion of what previous masters have said, Bonaventure thinks that the principles of natural law are grasped by conscience and not *synderesis*[α].[10] Bonaventure repeats his early thoughts on *synderesis*[α] in a very simplified form in his short handbook of theology, the *Breviloquium*

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[9] Lawell, '*Ne de ineffabili penitus taceamus*', pp. 153–56. In his first work, a commentary on Isaiah 6 *Vidi dominum sedentem* (*c*. 1218) Gallus uses the term *synderesis*, after which he only uses the term *synderesis scintilla*. On the history of the concept of *scintilla*, see Tardieu, '*Psychaios spinther*'.

[10] Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quattor libros sententiarum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, II, d. 39, a. 2, q. 1. Bonaventure's thought on *synderesis* can be found primarily here and in the two following *quaestiones*, and in IV, d. 50, p. 2, a. 2, q. 2. For an overview of Bonaventure's doctrine on *synderesis* and in relation to that of Philip the Chancellor, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas, see Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy*. Bonaventure probably held his lectures on the *Sentences* between 1250 and 1252, which in turn were reworked into the present form during his time as regent master at Paris 1253–57; see Bougerol, *Introduction à Saint Bonaventure*, pp. 5, 113–18, 128–31, 186–96, and Friedman, 'The *Sentences* Commentary, 1250–1320', p. 44. Bonaventure defines *bonum honestum* along the Ciceronian commonplace as 'that which attracts us by its virtue and draws us near it by its power', which Cicero exemplifies with knowledge, virtues, and truth. Cf. Cicero, *De inventione*, ed. by Stroebel, 2.52.

(1257), together with its commonplace definition: 'cuius est remumurare con-
tra malum et stimulare ad bonum' (its function is to murmur against evil and
stimulate to the good).[11] Between these two occurrences, in 1252 and 1257,
there is no sign that Bonaventure used the term *synderesis* in any other context
than that of moral psychology.

On 2 February 1257, Bonaventure was elected Minister General of the Fran-
ciscan Order in absentia. Suddenly, the scholar found himself at the helm of
an order whose membership was continually growing and which had spread
all across Europe. With this new post came the need for a different form of
literary output — one that focused on the spiritual edification of the order.
Accordingly, from his elevation to Minister General to his death in 1274,
Bonaventure produced texts that remain classics of Christian spirituality, the
*Lignum vitae*, *De triplici via*, the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (*Itinerarium*),
and his final work, the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*. The most famous of these
texts is probably the *Itinerarium*. In six chapters, it guides the reader through
six steps of contemplation, leading to the seventh chapter, where it briefly
attempts to describe the ecstatic union between God and the soul, exemplified
by Francis of Assisi, Bonaventure's predecessor and founder of his order, when
he received the stigmata.

In the *Itinerarium*'s prologue, Bonaventure recounts how he happened to
pass by Mount La Verna around the time of the feast of Francis (4 October)
in 1259 and, desiring to rest a while, remained there and contemplated the
ways by which the mind may ascend to God. Suddenly he recalled the miracle
in which Francis saw a six-winged seraph coming to him 'in the likeness of the
Crucified' (*ad instar Crucifixi*) and received the stigmata. Bonaventure uses
the image of Francis's ecstatic vision and reception of the stigmata to articu-
late a conceptual scheme of the path to mystical union — one that can easily
be grasped and remembered by Franciscans. The six wings represent the six
steps of the soul on its journey. These steps relate in turn to the six powers
of the soul involved in contemplation enumerated in the first chapter of the
*Itinerarium*: *sensus*, *imaginatio*, *ratio*, *intellectus*, *intelligentia*, and *apex mentis*
or *synderesis scintilla*.[12] By using the term *synderesis scintilla* and by making it

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[11]  Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 2. 11.

[12]  Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, prol. 2–3.
As McGinn notes, Bonaventure draws this list from the fivefold ascent outlined by Isaac of
Stella and as mediated through the pseudo-Augustinian text *De spiritu et anima*. McGinn, *The
Flowering of Mysticism*, p. 106.

synonymous with *apex mentis*, Bonaventure indicates that he is no longer talking about *synderesis* in the moral-psychological sense that could be seen in the *Commentary* and the *Breviloquium*, but about Thomas Gallus's mystical interpretation of *synderesis*, that is, *synderesis^β*. In addition, Bonaventure uses the term *apex affectus* which further indicates an influence from Gallus who often used the term *apex affectionis* as a synonym for *synderesis^β*.[13] Bonaventure only explicitly mentions *synderesis* in his enumeration of the powers of the soul in the first chapter, but it has the crucial function in the *Itinerarium* of taking the soul to mystical union.

Between the *Breviloquium* (1257) and the *Itinerarium* (*c*. 1259), Bonaventure thus changed his view on *synderesis*, presumably after having read Thomas Gallus during these years. Although Gallus's texts were circulated very early, I would like to propose two locations where Bonaventure likely encountered them: in Paris, where Bonaventure spent his winters and where Gallus was first trained at the abbey of St Victor, or in Vercelli, where he was abbot until his death in 1246. Since Vercelli was situated on one of the main roads connecting France and Italy, and had a Franciscan *studium*, it is possible that Bonaventure, now Minister General, stayed in Vercelli at some point to inspect the *studium* and at that time also visited Sant' Andrea, where Gallus's texts would have been kept.[14] Bonaventure crossed the French-Italian border six times between 1257 and 1260 and would thus have had several opportunities to encounter Gallus's writings in Vercelli.[15] Not only did Bonaventure's travels likely play a role in his appropriation of Gallus's use of *synderesis*; they also seem to have influenced his emphasis on the theme of pilgrimage in the *Itinerarium*, particularly the two months he spent on foot prior to his visit to La Verna. As Timothy Johnson points out, the physical act of ascending the mountains of Tuscany corresponds to Bonaventure's exhortation for a bodily preparation and prayer, which make the passage to the interior Jerusalem possible.[16]

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[13] That Bonaventure borrowed the terms *synderesis scintilla* and *apex mentis* from Gallus has been noted by several scholars; see e.g. McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism* p. 106, and Lawell, '*Spectacula contemplationis* (1244–46)', p. 257 n. 24. Cf. Lawell, '*Ne de ineffabili penitus taceamus*', pp. 169–70.

[14] On the close relations between the Franciscans and Victorines in Vercelli, see Châtillon, 'Saint Anthony of Padua and the Victorines' and Théry, 'Saint Antoine de Padoue et Thomas Gallus'.

[15] See Monti, 'Bonaventure as Minister General', pp. 566–67, for a short summary of Bonaventure's journeys.

[16] Johnson, 'Prologue as Pilgrimage, Bonaventure as Spiritual Cartographer', pp. 451–52.

## Synderesis *and the Ineffability Topos in the* Itinerarium

The ineffability topos of the *Itinerarium* is, I argue, structured around how Bonaventure conceives of how *synderesis*[β] relates to God as the highest good (*summum bonum*). This marks a shift from the *Commentary*, where *synderesis*[α] related to the moral good (*bonum honestum*).[17]

In the prologue and the first chapter of the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure outlines the structure of his text. As mentioned above, the six wings of the seraph represent the six steps of illumination by which the soul is prepared for the mystical union. These steps are paired together: the first two consider the world, the next two the soul, the final two the concept of God. Likewise, the six powers of the soul are paired, first under *sensualitas*, the powers that pertain to the senses, *spiritus*, the powers that consider the soul, and *mens*, which considers God.[18]

Although the first six chapters, the six steps of illumination, and the six powers of the soul were first outlined to stand in corresponding relationship to each other in the *Itinerarium*, this is not how the text is actually structured. Chapters 5 and 6, which according to Bonaventure's outline should cover the powers grouped under *mens*, that is, *intelligentia* and *synderesis*[β], are in fact arranged so that they both fall under *intelligentia*. Bonaventure has thus suddenly departed from his initial outline and apparently leaves *synderesis*[β] for later. When the reader comes to the sixth chapter, which was supposed to relate to the operation of *synderesis*, Bonaventure urges the reader to lift the eye of intelligence ('elevandus est oculus intelligentiae') to consider the Trinity.[19] Whilst the fifth chapter considers the concept of God as Being itself (*ipsum esse*), the sixth chapter expects the reader to engage with the concept of God as the highest good (*summum bonum*) through the power of the soul known as *intelligentia*. It is only after the consideration of God as the highest good that the soul falls into ecstasy, which is the topic of the seventh chapter. It is here that *synderesis*[β], or *apex mentis*, fits in.[20] That the *Itinerarium* devotes two chap-

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[17] For a study of *synderesis* as desire, drawing the soul to God and the good, see Davis, *The Weight of Love*, in particular chs 2 and 3. Davis disagrees with Lawell's distinction between *synderesis* in medieval ethical theory and in mystical theory (i.e. between *synderesis*[α] and *synderesis*[β]), *The Weight of Love*, pp. 52–53; cf. Lawell, '*Ne de ineffabili penitus taceamus*', p. 153. As will become clear in the following, I see the two uses of *synderesis* as distinct but intimately related.

[18] See Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, prol. 3, 1.2, 1.4–6.

[19] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 6.1.

[20] See McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism* p. 107, for a diagram that reflects this relation

ters on what is perceived through *intelligentia* before the chapter dealing with the ecstasy of the soul suggests that once the soul has grasped the concept of God as the highest good through *intelligentia*, in Chapter 6, then it is attracted to the good and driven to union, which is described in Chapter 7. Bonaventure has structured the first six chapters into pairs, where the final themes of each pair aptly introduces the next pair. The fourth chapter, for instance, ends with a consideration of how the heavenly Jerusalem descends into the soul, Jerusalem where God is immanent. This consideration opens up for the consideration of God as Being (*ipsum esse*) and as the highest good (*summum bonum*) in the following two chapters. The knowledge of God as the highest good therefore leads in a very natural way to the seventh chapter where the soul desires and unites with God. This suggests that *synderesis*[β] becomes active after the soul understands God as the highest good (*summum bonum*).

The notion of God as the highest good to which *synderesis*[β] attracts the soul shows how Bonaventure has reconsidered the role and function of *synderesis* since the *Commentary*. In the *Commentary*, *synderesis*[α] spurs the soul to seek the moral good (*bonum honestum*). In the first book of the *Commentary*, Bonaventure applies Augustine's distinction between things that can be used (*uti*) and things that can be enjoyed (*frui*). He asks whether there are things apart from God that may be enjoyed. To answer this question, he makes a distinction between enjoyment in the general sense of the word (*communiter accepto frui*) and enjoyment in the proper sense of the word (*proprie accepto frui*). Moral goods (*bona honesta*), such as virtues, belong to the category of things that can be enjoyed in the general sense of the word. Quoting Cicero, he says that they have a beauty which delights and attract us to them ('habent pulchritudinem, qua nos delectant et alliciunt').[21]

But Bonaventure introduces yet another distinction, which follow the same logic: one may speak of *bonum honestum* as the pure good (*pure bonum*), and of the good in which the likeness (*similitudo*) to this pure good shines forth. Only the pure good, which here must be taken to mean God, may be enjoyed in the proper sense of the word as a *bonum honestum*, but one may enjoy the goods of the virtues in the general sense of the word 'to enjoy'.[22]

between the chapters and the powers of the soul.

[21] Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quattor libros sententiarum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, I, d. 1, a. 3, q. 2. On Cicero, cf. note 10 above.

[22] Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quattor libros sententiarum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, I, d. 1, a. 3, q. 2.

The difference between the two senses of enjoyment lies in how the soul responds: enjoyment in the general sense of the word brings about delight (*delectatio*), but the soul cannot find its final rest there; only when attaining the highest good (*summum bonum*) does the soul experience not only delight (*delectatio*) but rest (*quietatio*). In other words, to find God means to find delight and rest.

I suggest that the analogical relation between the moral good and the highest good in the *Commentary* is the basis on which Bonaventure integrates Gallus's mystical interpretation of *synderesis* in the *Itinerarium*. In the *Commentary*, the moral good attracts *synderesis*[a] because it derives its beauty and goodness from the highest good. It has a trace of God in it which naturally attracts the soul. In the *Itinerarium*, *synderesis*[β] appears to become 'active' after having grasped God as the highest good (*summum bonum*). By shifting between the objects on this analogical scale, from the moral good to the highest good, Bonaventure has bridged the gap between moral psychology and mysticism. Although it is in continuity with the *Commentary*, it is at the same time a radical change. Following the logic of Bonaventure's thought in the *Commentary* on the attainment of the highest good, one would expect the pilgrim soul of the *Itinerarium* to find not only delight, but also rest after having been drawn to God as the highest good. Fittingly, in the seventh chapter of the *Itinerarium*, the terms 'peace' (*pax*) and 'rest' (*requies*) dominate the opening paragraphs. In his heading for the chapter Bonaventure describes the chapter as *in quo requies datur intellectui* (that in which rest is granted to the intellect), and the first lines emphasize this theme:

> His igitur sex considerationibus excursis tanquam sex gradibus veri Salomonis, quibus pervenitur ad pacem, ubi verus pacificus in mente pacifica tanquam in interior Hierosolyma requiescit.[23]

> [Having gone through these six steps, like the steps leading up to the throne of the true Solomon, by which we reach the peace, where the truly peaceful man rests in a peaceful mind like in an inner Jerusalem.]

These lines in turn correspond to the longing for peace the author expresses in the prologue as he prays that he and the reader may be given illumination so that they may walk on the road of that peace 'which transcends all understanding'.[24]

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[23] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 7.1. For a study of the radical and eschatological significance of the concept of 'peace' in the *Itinerarium*, see Hammond, 'An Historical Analysis of the Concept of Peace'.

[24] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, prol. 1.

In contrast to the *Commentary*, Bonaventure prefers the term *pax* to *quietatio* in the *Itinerarium*, or terms derived from the same root as *quietatio*, such as *requies* and *requiesco*, to designate the state of mind that is achieved when reaching mystical union. This is likely a result of putting the journey of the soul in relation to Francis who, as Bonaventure points out, always wished peace upon whomever he met (his famous greeting *pax et bonum*).[25] Bonaventure has thus shifted the object of *synderesis*, from *bonum honestum* in the *Commentary*, to *summum bonum* in the *Itinerarium*. It is a slight, yet significant, shift, which means that *synderesis* now concerns God as the highest good, instead of the moral goods of (for example) virtues. It has changed from a moral-psychological power to a mystical power that drives the soul towards God.

The seventh chapter thus represents the action of *synderesis*[ᵝ], as it is attracted to God as the highest good (*summum bonum*). In this chapter of the *Itinerarium*, when the contemplative soul has considered the physical world and its principles, the soul, and the concept of God, all that remains is mystical ecstasy. Bonaventure attempts to prepare the reader for the encounter with God and to highlight the incommensurability of language with what it is about to experience. But how can this essentially ineffable encounter be expressed? In most parts of the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure's scholastic language dominates — a sober and sometimes repetitive style. This changes entirely in the final chapter, where Bonaventure's language is, as it will be shown below, suffused with paradoxes, antitheses, and alliterations along with a more hypotactic structure, compared to the more sober, repetitive style used elsewhere, before the text ends. The object his language attempts to describe differs so radically from those covered by the other six chapters that this chapter has very little in common with them in terms of style. He emphasizes that in this *transitus* of the soul, its journey out of itself and into God, all intellectual workings of the mind must cease, and one must instead allow the summit of the affection (*apex affectionis*), the synonym for *synderesis*[ᵝ] he borrowed from Gallus, to be carried away into God.[26] Bonaventure emphasizes that the mystical experience is incommunicable: 'Hoc autem est mysticum et secretissimum' (For this is a mystical and most secret thing). Citing Revelation 2. 17 he says that 'no one knows it except the one who receives it', and that one cannot receive it without first desiring it. Desire, however, comes from the Holy Spirit, who puts the depths of the

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Cf. Luke 1. 79 and Philippians 4. 7.

[25] Cf. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, prol. 1.

[26] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 7.4.

soul on fire (*medullitus inflammat*).[27] The affective power of *synderesis*[β] has thus reached the point where it is kindled and emits its spark: *synderesis scintilla*. Bonaventure continues:

> Quoniam igitur ad hoc nihil potest natura, modicum potest industria, parum est dandum inquisitioni, et multum unctioni; parum dandum est linguae, et plurimum internae laetitiae; parum dandum est verbo et scripto, et totum Dei dono, scilicet Spiritui sancto; parum aut nihil dandum est creaturae, et totum creatrici essentiae, Patri et Filio et Spiritui sancto.[28]

> [Since nature is of no help in this regard, and effort only little, little importance should be given to inquiry, and much to unction; little importance should be given to the tongue, and much more to inner joy; little importance should be given to word and script, and all to God's gift, that is, the Holy Spirit; little or no importance should be given to creation, and all to the creative Being, that is, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.]

This passage is constructed in a series of juxtapositions between worldly, unimportant things introduced with *parum est dandum* (used as anaphora) and heavenly things, introduced with *multum*, *plurimum*, or *totum*. This structure strongly emphasizes the need to leave the world of human activity (*industria*) behind. The anaphora of *parum* is balanced against the arrangement of *multum — plurimum — totum* and underscores how the soul travels further into ecstasy at each passing second. The repetitiveness of *parum*, contrasted to the crescendo created with *multum*, *plurimum*, and *totum*, creates a stark contrast between the world and the divine to which the soul is journeying. This is emphasized in the final pair where 'little or no (*parum aut nihil*) importance should be given to creation, and all (*et totum*) to the creative Being'. At this point the antithesis reaches its extreme with creation on the one hand and the Creator on the other. The first three of these pairs balance the workings of the intellect against the gifts of the Spirit (*unctio*, *laetitia*, *Spiritus sanctus*). This construction emphasizes the supra-rational workings of *synderesis*[β]. Reason and intellect cannot bring the soul to union; only the affective power of *synderesis*[β] can do that.

A similar use of antithesis to illustrate the transcendence of the experience brought about by *synderesis*[β] can be found a few lines later, where Bonaventure focuses on the need for divine help instead of human effort, and the need for desire rather than speculation:

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[27]  Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 7.4.

[28]  Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 7.5.

Si autem quaeras, quomodo haec fiant, interroga gratiam non doctrinam; desiderium, non intellectum; gemitum orationis, non studium lectionis; sponsum, non magistrum; Deum, non hominem; caliginem non claritatem; non lucem sed ignem totaliter inflammantem et in Deum excessivis unctionibus et ardentissimis affectionibus transferentem.[29]

[If you wonder how this is to be brought about, ask grace, not doctrine; desire, not the intellect; the groan of prayer, not devotion to reading; the bridegroom, not the teacher; God, not man; the darkness, not clarity; not light, but the fire which completely inflames and transfers you into God by means of ecstatic unctions and ardent affections.]

The final part of this quotation once more points to the need for *synderesis*[β] to be 'kindled', where the soul is passive and allows God to act on it. The soul has reached the point where it has first grasped the concept of God as the highest good (through *intelligentia*), whereupon *synderesis*[β] has been drawn to it and now being set on fire, so that it emits its spark.

Between these two examples of Bonaventure's rhetoric, he introduces the opening lines from pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology*, in John Scotus Eriugena's Latin translation, which highlights the paradoxical nature of the mystical experience. This passage, quoted below, employs a language full of paradoxes, and through the use of the prefix *super*, thus signifying that the mind is now moving beyond rational inquiry:

Trinitas superessentialis et superdeus et superoptime Christianorum inspector theosophiae, dirige nos in mysticorum eloquiorum superincognitum et superlucentem et sumblissimum verticem; ubi nova et absoluta et inconversibilia theologiae mysteria secundum superlucentem absconduntur occulte docentis silentii caliginem in obscurissimo, quod est supermanifestissimum, supersplendentem, et in qua omne relucet, et invisibilium superbonorum splendoribus superimplentem invisibiles intellectus.[30]

[Trinity, essence beyond essence and God beyond all deities, and most excellent protector of the wisdom of Christians, guide us to that totally hidden but radiant and most sublime height of mystical knowledge. There new mysteries — the new, absolute, and unchangeable mysteries of theology — lie hidden in the dazzling darkness of a silence that teaches secretly in a total obscurity that is super-manifest

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[29] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 7.6.

[30] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 7.5. Cf. John Scotus Eriugena, *Sancti Dionysii Areopagitae liber quartus de mystica theologia*, ed. by Migne, cols 1171–73. Bonaventure acknowledges pseudo-Dionysius as the author, but not Eriugena as the translator.

and in a super-resplendent darkness in which all things shine forth; a darkness which fills invisible intellects with a full superabundance and splendour of invisible goods that are above all good.]

Bonaventure has intentionally used a text known for its obscure and paradoxical language to illustrate the workings of the mind at the point where *synderesis*⁶ takes it beyond all rational inquiry. The mind is no longer contemplating that which can be put into analytical categories, but that which transcends all categories and language. The quotation from pseudo-Dionysius is therefore well chosen to illustrate how the mind reacts, and it signals that Bonaventure is drawing near the logical end of the text, where words are no longer useful.

In order to understand what is happening in the seventh chapter, it is necessary to return to the preceding chapter first, for it is here that Bonaventure builds up to the ecstatic end of the *Itinerarium*. To some extent, the change in Bonaventure's language, from scholastic precision to mystical paradox, can already be seen in the sixth chapter. This chapter is, as noted above, a reflection on God as the highest good (*summum bonum*). The chapter ends with a consideration of the manifestation of goodness incarnate in Christ.

In hac autem consideratione est perfectio illuminationis mentis, dum quasi in sexta die videt hominem factum ad imaginem Dei. Si enim imago est similitudo expressiva, dum mens nostra contemplatur in Christo Filio Dei, qui est imago Dei invisibilis per naturam, humanitatem nostram tam mirabiliter exaltatam, tam ineffabiliter unitam, videndo simul in unum primum et ultimum, summum et imum, circumferentiam et centrum, *alpha et omega*, causatum et causam, Creatorem et creaturam, *librum* scilicet *scriptum intus et extra*; iam pervenit ad quandam rem perfectam, ut cum Deo ad perfectionem suarum illuminationum in sexto gradu quasi in sexta die perveniat, nec aliquid iam amplius restet nisi dies requiei, in qua per mentis excessum requiescat humanae mentis perspicacitas *ab omni opere, quod patrarat*.³¹

[In this consideration is the perfection of the mind's illumination, when, as if on the sixth day, it shall see man made in the image of God. If then the image is an express likeness when our mind contemplates in Christ the Son of God, who is the natural image of the invisible God, our humanity now wonderfully exalted, now ineffably united, by seeing at once in one Being the first and the last, the highest and the lowest, the circumference and the centre, the alpha and the omega, the caused and the cause, the Creator and the creature, the book written within and without, it [the mind] arrives at a perfect being in order that it may arrive with God at the perfection of his illuminations on the sixth level, as if on the sixth day; nor

³¹ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 6.7.

does anything more remain save the day of rest, on which, by the elevation of the mind, its insight rests from all work which he had done.]

The pilgrim soul first encounters the human face of God, before the mystical ecstasy begins. The creator who became a creature, joining the highest with the lowest, is the ultimate paradox which here functions as the stepping stone into the seventh chapter. The unity of human and divine in Christ is not, as George Tavard points out, a 'coincidence of opposites'. Rather, he points out that Bonaventure affirms in the *Commentary* that God and creation are not opposed but related to each other as the creature is related to God as its beginning and end. As evidence, Tavard cites Bonaventure's third book of his *Commentary*: 'in regard to the sum total of its characteristics, it transcends all natural types of unity and even all other unity achieved by grace'.[32] The final theme of the sixth chapter, Christ as the manifestation of the highest good (to which *synderesis* attracts the soul), and who is ineffably united to human nature, therefore aptly introduces the seventh, in which Bonaventure's language reaches its limits.

In the final paragraph of the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure abandons the use of antithesis and builds up a series of biblical quotations before he falls silent. Beginning with a quotation from Exodus 33. 20 (No man shall see me and live), the *Itinerarium* ends thus:

> Moriamur igitur et ingrediamur in caliginem, imponamus silentium sollicitudinibus, concupiscentiis et phantasmatibus; transeamus cum Christo crucifixo *ex hoc mundo ad Patrem*, ut, ostenso nobis Patre, dicamus cum Philippo: *Sufficit nobis*; audiamus cum Paulo: 'Sufficit tibi gratia mea'; exsultemus cum David dicentes: 'Defecit caro mea et cor meum, Deus cordis mei et pars mea Deus in aeternum. Benedictus Dominus in aeternum, et dicet omnis populus: Fiat Fiat. Amen'.[33]

> [Let us die, then, and enter into the darkness, let us impose silence upon all our unrest, desires and imaginings. Let us go with the crucified Christ from this world to the Father so that, when the Father is shown to us, we may say with Philip 'It is enough for us'; so that we may hear with Paul 'My grace is enough for you'; so that we may exult with David and say 'My flesh and heart fail me, you are the God of my heart and God is my inheritance forever. Blessed be the Lord forever, and all the people will say: May it be, may it be. Amen'.]

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[32] Tavard, 'The Coincidence of Opposites', p. 581. Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quattor libros sententiarum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, III, d. 6, a. 1, q. 2: 'Quantum ad omnes conditiones simul collectas, nullum modum habet unitatis sibi consimilem, quia superexcedit omnem naturam et omnem aliam gratiam communem.'

[33] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 7.6.

The paradoxical experience of the mind cannot be rendered by human words, and they must therefore cease. In a way, this passage reflects Bonaventure's exhortation to move from word and script to the gift of the Holy Spirit, as he relies almost exclusively on scriptural passages that express the jubilant soul as it is drawn into mystical union. The mind has come to cease in its operation as silence is imposed on solicitudes, desires, and phantasms, and it reaches that peace which characterizes the enjoyment (*proprie accepto frui*) of the highest good. In the end, holy words are used when human words do not suffice to describe the encounter brought about by *synderesis*$^\beta$. Bonaventure then falls silent, having reached the climactic end of the text and guided the soul to its destination. The mystical power of *synderesis* has thus been drawn to the highest good, God, whereupon it has been ignited by the Holy Spirit ('et in Deum excessivis unctionibus et ardentissimis affectionibus transferentem') and emitted its spark — *synderesis scintilla*.[34]

## Francis and the Stigmata

The *Itinerarium* is, however, not only a reflection on the mind's journey to mystical union with God in general. By taking Francis as his example, Bonaventure makes a statement about one of the most fundamental events in the Franciscan narrative: Francis's reception of the stigmata. In using *synderesis*$^\beta$ to explain how the soul may reach mystical union, Bonaventure makes the assumption that everyone possesses this power, which in turn means that it was also working in Francis as he achieved mystical union.[35] But by recalling the well-known image of Francis's transformed body, Bonaventure also shows how the action of *synderesis* was made manifest.[36] In other words, Francis's stigmata articulate the ineffable encounter with God brought about by *synderesis*$^\beta$ in a way that Bonaventure's words cannot.

Bonaventure explains in the prologue to the *Itinerarium* that the only way to mystical ecstasy is through an ardent love of Christ. Quoting Paul, Bonaventure links that love to the power that lifted the apostle up to the third heaven and his famous identification with Christ's suffering: 'I am crucified with Christ, I live, not of myself, but Christ through me'.[37] This love, Bonaventure thinks,

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[34] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 7.6.

[35] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1.6.

[36] For a similar argument, but applied to the slightly later *Legenda maior*, see Davis, *The Weight of Love*, ch. 5.

[37] ii Corinthians 12. 2; Galatians 2. 20.

absorbed the mind (*mens*) of the saint to such an extent that it was reflected in his flesh through the stigmata.[38] What Bonaventure points out here is that there is first an inner transformation in the part of the soul called *mens* (of which *apex mentis* or *synderesis* is the highest part), which in turn is reflected in the body of Francis. This is the process that is described in the final two chapters of the *Itinerarium*: the mind beholds God as the highest good, of which Christ is the fullest manifestation, whereupon the soul is attracted to this good and achieves mystical union. That inner union is in the case of Francis manifested physically, as his body reflects that of Christ crucified. This process echoes a homily on the stigmata by Bonaventure from *c.* 1255 in which he says, paraphrasing Hugh of St Victor, that 'the power of love (*amor*) is so strong that it turns the lover into the beloved'.[39] In the *Itinerarium*, *synderesis* takes the function of *amor* in this transformative encounter. As the soul comes to know God as the highest good, through *intelligentia* in the sixth chapter, it cannot but love and desire God, a desire that is fulfilled in the seventh chapter. In Francis's case this love so absorbed him that his body was eventually transformed into an image of the beloved. This is a point where Bonaventure is truly innovative: he has set up a theoretical framework within which Francis's ecstasy can be placed. One of the features that makes the *Itinerarium* unique is that it articulates a belief which until then had mainly been treated within the genre of hagiography.

The fact that the *Itinerarium* synthesizes not only scholasticism and mysticism, but also to some extent scholastic theology and hagiography is not a coincidence. The General Chapter of 1257 that elected Bonaventure Minister General had commissioned the writing of a new legend of Francis — what in time would become the *Legenda maior* and *Legenda minor*.[40] The presence of Francis and the focus on the stigmata should therefore be seen in relation to one of Bonaventure's first, and one of his most crucial, missions as Minister General. Both texts focus on the need to imitate Francis and his reception of the stigmata. Imitation is, however, only possible if the reader shares the same psychological constitution as Francis. By assuming that the powers of the soul listed in the first chapter of the *Itinerarium* are present in all humans, Bonaventure

[38] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, prol. 3.

[39] Bonaventure, *De s. patre nostro*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, p. 595. Cf. Hugh of St Victor, *Soliloquium de arrha animae*, ed. by Migne, col. 954.

[40] It has for a long time been taken for granted that Bonaventure was commissioned to write the *Legenda maior* and *Legenda minor* by the chapter of Narbonne in 1260, but as Hammond has showed, an earlier date is more likely; see Hammond, 'Bonaventure's *Legenda Major*', pp. 453–58.

thus outlines the basis upon which imitation is possible. But Bonaventure's arrangement of the chapters, with the ecstasy of the mind placed after the chapter where he considers the concept of God as the highest good, also sheds light on how *synderesis*[β] relates to Francis's stigmata. Bonaventure analyses the highest good according to the principle that goodness is inherently self-giving (*diffusivum sui*). It thus follows, he thinks, that the highest good is also that which is the most self-giving: 'summum igitur bonum summe diffusivum est sui'.[41] He then considers the doctrine of the Trinity as a manifestation of God's goodness. The meditation ends as shown above, in a meditation on Christ incarnate, which leads over to the ecstasy of the seventh chapter. The ultimate sign of God's self-giving goodness is Christ's wounds, the marks of his love for humanity, which in turn were replicated on Francis's body. *Synderesis*[β], which has been drawn towards and united with the highest good, thus transforms the mind of the contemplative Francis so that his mind and body are assimilated to the primary manifestation of the highest good — Christ crucified.

In a way, the wounds of Christ appearing on Francis's body articulate the ineffability topos in a manner that transcends Bonaventure's attempt to describe the mystical experience in the final chapter. As noted above, Bonaventure believed that the love of Christ so absorbed the mind (*mens*) of Francis that Christ's wounds appeared on his body. The affective union of *mens* through *synderesis*[β] as its highest power is ultimately beyond words, but its effects can be seen on Francis. The presence of Francis in the *Itinerarium* is, in other words, not only meant as an example to imitate, but as an image of the ineffable union. In fact, the link between the stigmata and the ineffability topos has been made prior to the *Itinerarium*. In his second *Vita* of Francis, Thomas of Celano writes poetically about the transformation of the saint's body at La Verna, in a way that later echoes through the imagery of the *Itinerarium*:

> Et fortassis ideo in carne debuit aperiri, quia non potuisset sermonibus explicari. Loquatur ergo silentium, ubi deficit verbum, quia et signatum clamat, ubi deficit signum.[42]

> [And perchance it therefore needed to appear in the flesh, because it could not be explained by words. Let therefore silence speak, where words fail, for what is being signified shouts out, where the sign [i.e. words] fails.]

Where ordinary words fail, as they also do in the *Itinerarium*, the transformed body of Francis, presented for the reader's imagination at the beginning and at

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[41]  Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 6.2.

[42]  Thomas of Celano, *Vita secunda*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, p. 246.

the end of the journey, speaks eloquently. Francis's body shows what union to the highest, and most self-giving, good looks like, an image of Christ's kenotic love in service of others.

## A Defense of the Stigmata?

In systematizing the way to God and ecstatic union as exemplified by Francis, Bonaventure responds to the need to reassert the cult of Francis in the face of doubt and criticism directed against this fundamental event. The cult of Francis, and in particular the stigmata, had been questioned almost from the very start. As André Vauchez notes, between 1237 and 1291 there were nine papal bulls confirming the miracle in the face of criticisms that had been directed against the stigmata. In 1257, Pope Alexander IV claimed to have seen the stigmata with his own eyes. The same pontiff had at an unknown date written to the Archbishop of Genoa ordering him to punish those who had erased the stigmata from depictions of Francis.[43] Even within the order there were questions raised, as the first generation of friars began to die out. The friar Thomas Eccleston records that at the chapter of Genoa (1249 or 1251), some friars expressed their doubts regarding the stigmata, and one witness, friar Bonicio, had to be called in to testify.[44] Furthermore, the visceral hatred of the mendicants expressed by William of Saint-Amour, to whom Bonaventure responded in *Quaestiones disputatae de perfectione evangelica*, *De mendicitate*, and *Apologia pauperum*, also posed a challenge for the cult of Francis. In one of his responses to Bonaventure, for instance, William writes that even if the various miracles associated with Francis were true, they do not prove that the man is holy, since many evil men have also performed miracles and, referring to Matthew 24. 24, many false prophets would appear in the final days with false miracles.[45] The implications of such a statement for one of the most important events in Franciscan history cannot have been lost on Bonaventure.[46]

In an attempt to affirm the historicity of the stigmata, Bonaventure writes in chapter 7 of the *Itinerarium* that he was thinking about Francis's vision of

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[43] Vauchez, 'Les Stigmates de saint François et leurs détracteurs', pp. 601–03.

[44] Thomas of Eccleston, *De adventu fratrum minorum in Angliam*, ed. by Little, p. 74.

[45] William of Saint-Amour, *The Opuscula*, ed. by Traver, p. 135.

[46] Indeed, as Jay M. Hammond points out, 'Many, if not all, of the forty-two signs that identify the mendicant orders as false preachers/apostles in the time of the Antichrist influence Bonaventure's writing of the *Legenda Major*'. Hammond, 'Bonaventure's *Legenda Major*', p. 467.

the seraph at Mount La Verna, 'ut ibidem a socio eius, qui tunc cum eo fuit, ego et plures alii audivimus' (as I and many others have been told at that very same place from his companion who was with him then).[47] By directing the reader's attention back to La Verna (*ibidem*), this links the end of the *Itinerarium* to its prologue in which Bonaventure writes about how he arrived at La Verna, as the seventh successor of Francis as Minister General. With an eye to the skepticism both inside and outside the order, Bonaventure here invokes his authority as Minister General and successor of Francis, the eyewitnesses of the stigmata, as well as giving the psychological terms with which the reader may understand the event that brought about the stigmata. Although not hagiography in itself, the *Itinerarium* undoubtedly appeals to the hagiographic tradition and the social memory of the order in choosing Francis's vision and stigmata as the central imagery of the text.

## Conclusion

*Synderesis* appears on only two further occasions in Bonaventure's writings: first in *De triplici via*, which is considered to have been written at about the same time as the *Itinerarium*, and in a Christmas sermon datable either to 1253 or 1269. In the first case, *synderesis* appears in a moral-psychological function, which differs from that in the discussions in the *Commentary*. In the *De triplici via*, Bonaventure considers the way to spiritual perfection. In one section, he discusses how reason, *synderesis*, conscience, and will operate in making a moral judgement. Here, *synderesis* is thought to offer the possible solutions to a moral problem. While this idea of *synderesis* differs from the *Commentary*, it is still operating firmly within a moral-psychological framework.[48] In his Christmas sermon, preached to his fellow Franciscans in Paris, Bonaventure uses the rainbow as an image of the Incarnation: the rainbow touches the earth with its two feet, whilst its top, *vertex*, touches heaven. In a similar way, Bonaventure thinks, Christ walked the earth in spirit and flesh, while he inhabited heaven by virtue of *synderesis*.[49] This use of *synderesis* is more in line with its function in the *Itinerarium*: *synderesis* is identified with the *vertex* which pierces through to heaven, just as *synderesis*'s synonym *apex mentis* bridged the chasm between created and creator in the *Itinerarium*.

[47] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium* mentis in Deum, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 7.3.

[48] Bonaventure, *De triplici via*, ed. by Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1. 19.

[49] Bonaventure, *Sermons de tempore*, ed. by Bougerol, p. 145.

After this sermon, the term *synderesis* disappears entirely from Bonaventure's vocabulary. Not even in his final mystical treatise, the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*, does the concept appear.

Bonaventure's use of the term *synderesis* has thus undergone a series of changes, first within a moral-psychological framework as in the *Commentary*, *Breviloquium*, and *De triplici via*, and then to the mystical interpretation, influenced by Gallus, in the *Itinerarium*. Bonaventure thus appears to take a highly experimental approach to *synderesis*, applying its different meanings according to the particular demands of his texts and the genres he moves between and synthesizes. If the *Itinerarium* can be characterized as a synthesis between Bonaventure's scholastic training and mystic fervour, his use of *synderesis*[6] in the same text is a microcosm of this synthesis. The constantly changing nature of *synderesis* in the writings of Bonaventure should make us aware of the pitfalls of assuming that the work of a medieval author over the course of over twenty years can be reduced to the static notion of his 'thought'. The main pillars of Bonaventure's theology and philosophy may remain intact over the years, but what is clearly evident here is that beneath the surface, Bonaventure is experimenting with his concepts. Unlike other scholastic authors, Bonaventure appears to have grasped the full range of meaning of this highly elusive concept. Bonaventure is unique in the sense that he moves between both these frameworks of interpreting *synderesis* — a feature which reflects the eclecticism and dynamism that characterized so much of his writing.

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# The Art of Rambling:
## Errant Thoughts and Entangled Passions in Petrarch's 'The Ascent of Mont Ventoux' (*Familiares* IV, 1) and *RVF* 129

Francesca Southerden

While it has never been explicitly read as such, Francesco Petrarch's *Familiares* IV, 1 — a Latin prose epistle recounting the author's real or imagined ascent of Mont Ventoux — bears all the hallmarks of a 'thought experiment'. The author claims he wrote the letter, 'raptim et ex tempore' ('hastily and extemporaneously'), just after returning down the mountain in 1336, but it likely dates to 1353 — a first indication of the text's potential to deviate from the experience it purports to describe and may instead perform, or fail to perform.[1] Petrarch's excursion, prompted merely by his *curiositas* to see

[1] *Familiares* IV, 1, p. 844. Quotations come from *Familiarum rerum libri*, in Petrarca, *Prose*, ed. by Martellotti and others (here, p. 179); page numbers refer to this edition. Translations are from Petrarca, *Rerum familiarum libri I–VIII*, trans. by Bernardo, unless otherwise stated. On the fictional dating of Petrarch's letter, and its implications for the patterning of his spiritual biography against Augustine's (in 1336, he would be the same age as Augustine (32) when he converted), see Billanovich, 'Petrarca e il Ventoso', p. 396; Ascoli, 'Petrarch's Middle Age', p. 11.

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the view from the summit, leads to an excursus.[2] The autobiographical details with which the letter opens (his desire to climb; the conditions favourable to his undertaking; the choice of his brother, Gherardo, to accompany him) usher in Petrarch's extended speculation on the disposition of the climbers' bodies and minds, the correspondence in their ascent between the material and spiritual worlds (the arduous physical climb; the steep and narrow path that leads heavenward), and the author's aspirations towards a state of moral and spiritual perfection for which Augustine's *Confessions* is presented as the textual exemplum. Simultaneously, Petrarch's letter becomes a protracted digression, in which what seems incidental (the wrong turns, delays, and detours along the way) redirects the narrative towards his resistance, or inability, to embrace the paradigm of full conversion.

In what follows, I present the notion of rambling as a means to explore a particular declension of errancy in Petrarch, where to err is to wander but also to stray into error. I argue that Petrarch's rambling is systematic enough in its unsystematic traits to be considered an 'art': his wilfully getting lost, sidetracked, or losing himself (in thought) and the ambivalent pleasure he takes from that experience, even while knowing it is wrong. Simultaneously, at the textual level, rambling denotes a discourse that keeps branching off and displacing its focus from the ascent, and its attendant moral and spiritual virtues, to everything outlying, disrupting, or deferring it. What emerges is a dimension of Petrarch's text we might call 'poetic',[3] especially when read alongside its lyric and erotic counterpart, canzone 129 of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (henceforth *RVF*), likely written in the early 1340s.[4] In terms of desire, which for Petrarch inevitably denotes a restive (and often doomed) search for fulfilment, poem and letter form a diptych. In *RVF* 129, the poet casts Love's tyranny over the desiring subject as a compulsive and ineluctable drive, 'di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte' ('from thought to thought and mountain to mountain'); 'The Ascent of Mont Ventoux' (henceforth 'The Ascent') is osten-

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[2] In the medieval context, *curiositas* implied excessive desire for worldly knowledge and a looking for its own sake. It was thus perceived as dangerous, and even sinful, since it could cause the soul to become lost in the things of the world.

[3] Cf. Vincent Gillespie's exploration of the category of the 'poetic' in his essay in this volume, especially in relation to imaginative landscapes.

[4] See Santagata's commentary to the poem, in Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. by Santagata, p. 627. All quotations from *RVF* 129 come from this edition. Translations are from *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, ed. and trans. by Durling.

sibly presented as a way out of this tangle, but at the summit the Petrarchan 'I' finds itself caught as tightly as ever in the snare of *cupiditas*.

In both letter and poem, the key adjective describing the self and its errant thought is the Latin *vagus* or Italian 'vago' (given in the poem in the phrase, 'mente vaga' (yearning mind, with a capacity for distraction)), which marks desire out as a directionless wandering, 'sine via'.[5] In each case, desire moves the subject but without any firm sense of destination. The mind is dispersed, unstable; pleasure and desire are intensified by vacillation and errancy but also prone to dissipate; thought is ramiform rather than focused. Both texts stage an imaginative extension of thought within an ideal landscape (one nonetheless rooted in the real landscape of Vaucluse). Most importantly, each text puts into play a thinking, feeling, and desiring subject, which, however far it wanders, still encounters itself. In letter and poem, the journey of desire (and/or writing or thinking) does not stimulate the will to act but repeatedly confirms the Petrarchan 'I' to be suspended at a midpoint, plagued by the split will but crucially also fascinated by it. Errancy should be objectless, but a comparison of 'The Ascent' with *RVF* 129 reveals that while rambling is instinctive for the desirer, it is never innocent. Read together, these texts reveal the boundaries of Petrarch's 'art of rambling' as well as the particular topography of desire that shapes his thought experiment in lyric poem and narrative text respectively.

## The Nature of Petrarch's Thought Experiment, or the Boundaries of his Errancy

Petrarch's 'Ascent' begins with the author's conflation of the geographical landscape and a landscape of the mind, as he sets his 'experienced' journey within the boundaries of the literary and phantasmatic. The climb that he undertook 'today' (*hodierno*), he explains, was one that he had had in mind (*in animo*) for many years and finally acted out: 'Cepit impetus tandem aliquando *facere* quod quotidie *faciebam*' (p. 830; I was driven to finally do the thing I had daily thought of doing), a line that posits recursiveness within innovation.[6] We are told that what moved him to this other kind of performance (*facere* designates at once the prior movement of the imagination and the subsequent bodily act) was his rereading of Livy's account of Philip of Macedon's climb of

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[5] See Isidore's entry on 'vagus', in *Etymologiae*, x. 5. 280, ed. by Lindsay: 'Vagus, quia sine via' ('Wandering, because without a path'; Isidore, *The Etymologies*, trans. by Barney and others).

[6] My translation.

Mount Haemus with his troops.[7] While Petrarch admits that the veracity of Livy's text cannot be ascertained (hinting at the possible speciousness of his own), its suggestiveness as a model of topographical adventure is apparently enough to propel him from the universe of his reading into the physical world beyond. In turn, Petrarch's impetus to scale the physical mountain of Ventoux eventually leads him to another text, Augustine's *Confessions*, which he reads at the summit, and to the intimately Augustinian space of self-reflection that lies within his 'campis cogitationum' or 'field of thoughts' (p. 838).[8] The upward, spiritualizing trajectory implies progress, but movement in the letter is centrifugal rather than rectilinear and comes to rest at the foot of the mountain, where it began.[9] The early reference to Philip of Macedon may even threaten misadventure: his expedition was bungled (if it ever took place), and as Unn Falkeid notes, there is consequently a certain irony in Petrarch 'wanting to imitate a journey that Livy has already described as unsuccessful', since it pre-emptively problematizes the journey in toto, including the Augustinian leg at the summit.[10] Combining autobiography, historiography, geography, and fiction, Petrarch's text bares the ambivalence of its central premise that it is a spontaneous and authentic account of the author's experience.[11] Several elements of the letter point instead to its status as an elaborate (inter)textual labyrinth enabling a play of subject positions, none of which are definitive.[12]

This core ambiguity leaves the letter's meaning to be determined. It has been read as the dawn of recreational mountaineering, a birth of modern subjectivity, or proof of a burgeoning humanist aesthetic.[13] For many, its ironic, self-aware, and metatextual character points to a crisis or collapse of Christian allegoresis,

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[7]  Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, XL. 21. 2.

[8]  On the crucial function of memory and imagination in mediating these transitions, see Ascoli, 'Petrarch's Middle Age', p. 27 (his translation).

[9]  'Hos inter undosi pectoris motus [...] ad illud hospitiolum rusticum unde ante lucem moveram, profunda nocte remeavi' (p. 844; 'Among these movements of my searching heart [...] I returned late at night to that little rustic inn from which I had set out before daylight', p. 179).

[10]  Falkeid, 'Petrarch, Mont Ventoux and the Modern Self', p. 11.

[11]  Cf. Cachey, 'Petrarchan Cartographic Writing', p. 80. See also O'Connell, 'Authority and the Truth of Experience'.

[12]  Cf. Formica and Jakob, 'Commento', p. 44.

[13]  On Petrarch as *alpinista*, see e.g. Finzi, *Petrarca*, pp. 19–21, a view now discredited by e.g. Billanovich, 'Petrarca e il Ventoso'; on the letter's status as a watershed moment in the history of human consciousness, see e.g. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, esp. pp. 269–78.

or unveils the fragility of allegory's mechanisms for reading meaning beyond the physical world.[14] The letter's relationship to its landscape (part interior, part exterior) may herald a new perspective on nature — the resurgence of a pagan curiosity, or a growing anthropocentrism to counter a more medieval theocentrism.[15] Conversely, if the letter can be read as the triumph of a personal ethics rooted in Augustinian interiority, a classical paradigm is subsumed again to a Christian one, which ultimately regards the temporal world with suspicion and seeks to move beyond it.[16] At this point, the literal mountain falls away, although we are left with a mountain of words — and words, as Augustine teaches, are as temporally bound as any marker of difference in the created world.[17] Memory, a crucial Augustinian and Petrarchan preoccupation, acts as one further agent of displacement as it 'surreptitiously converts authentic experiences both physical (did [Petrarch] really make the climb?) and spiritual (was his struggle a "sincere" one?) into rhetorical recombinations'. It does not 'preclud[e] the literal event of climbing a mountain; it simply makes it impossible for us to tell what is "true" and what is "false", what is remembered and what is imagined'.[18]

Analysing 'The Ascent' as a thought experiment allows us to keep each of these perspectives in mind without having to choose between them or be tempted to resolve their apparent contradictions. If it fails to achieve the task it sets itself, that failure is nonetheless productive, and certainly meaningful.[19] Ultimately it enables us to see Petrarch's text as nurturing paradox — not a 'method' so much as 'life' itself — which leaves its author free not only to enact logical incongruities but also, and especially, to stage the 'simultaneous (not serial) affirmation of the totally irreconcilable, incompatible, opposed'. He does not mute 'strangeness' but embraces it.[20]

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[14] On the crisis or collapse of allegory, see especially Durling, 'The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory' and, on the tension between the late medieval and early humanist perspectives at play in the letter, see Ascoli, 'Petrarch's Middle Age'.

[15] See e.g. Gebser, *The Ever-Present Origin*, pp. 12–15; Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, pp. 143–45.

[16] Cf. Capodivacca, '"Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte"'.

[17] For additional summary of these critical responses to the letter, see Formica and Jakob, 'Commento', pp. 36–45. For Augustine's discussion of language and temporality, see e.g. *Confessions* XI. 27, on the unfolding of sounds and syllables in time.

[18] Ascoli, 'Petrarch's Middle Age', pp. 33–34.

[19] On the notion of 'productive failure', see Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* and Gragnolati, *Amor che move*, pp. 51–67.

[20] On paradox in this sense, see Bynum, 'Why Paradox?', pp. 435–36.

Petrarch's letter is nothing if not strange in this sense. As Giuseppe Mazzotta reminds us, the author presents his ascent both as 'quest' and 'gratuitous mountain climbing', where gratuitous implies not just something found pleasurable for its own sake, but also an implicit transgression of the quest itself.[21] Petrarch's endeavour could indeed conjure the romance quest, in which forms of deferral and distraction at once complicate and intensify the discourse of desire, and certainly contribute to furthering the narrative albeit not necessarily in a progressive, linear, or teleological fashion.[22] The letter's events likewise unfold through Petrarch's mapping of a range of spatial, psychological, and textual transitions that parallel one another without necessarily occurring in synchrony. Following the largely mental impulses of the primary phase (his jaunt into Livy's world; the circuitous thought process that leads him to settle on his brother as ideal companion for his journey), Petrarch comes to the climb itself, though, as we shall see, here too his text is made up of nodes and branches rather than a single narrative stem. His movements in space, thought, and writing are almost rhizomatic since, however fractured or bent the lines become, they 'always tie back to one another'.[23]

This kind of movement is also discernible in Petrarch's earlier lyric text, *RVF* 129, which indicates that rambling and deviation are the primary modes of Petrarchan desire. Here, the poetic subject, entirely under Love's dominion, is engaged in an almost endless peregrination from thought to thought and mountain to mountain. By way of this topography, the poet maps a 'phenomenology of the mind in love', one that regards thinking as the 'occurrence or outcome of the phantasms of love's compulsions', through which it is also derailed.[24] The dispersions of thought drive the lover on (both forwards and back), and leave him bewildered. Desire is born of uncertainty and intensified by it ('Questo arde e di suo stato è incerto'; 'This man is burning and his state is uncertain', l. 13) and uncertainty paves the way for the fantasy that reciprocation might be possible. The cipher of Petrarch's lyric thought experiment is consequently the poetic 'forse' (perhaps, ll. 22, 24, 53) whose indeterminacy creates a space for doubt and, crucially, opens up the play of further desire rather than brute frustration.

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[21] Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 19.

[22] Cf. Daniel Reeve's essay in this volume, which explores these features of narrative in relation to Alan of Lille's *De planctu Naturae* and Hue of Rotelande's *Ipomedon*.

[23] Deleuze and Guattari, 'Introduction: Rhizome', p. 9.

[24] Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 52.

Rather than permit true deliberation, or provide a spur to rational action, what Petrarch calls 'thought' (*pensier*), in *RVF* 129, is intended to deceive the mind by eliding the nature of his beloved, Laura, as mere phantasm and substantiating her as matter. This reverses the traditional, Aristotelian process of apprehension and intellection insofar as it is an attempt to rematerialize an abstracted image as substance rather than to dematerialize a sensory perception towards a higher mode of cognition.[25] In lines 1–2, as Albert Ascoli notes, thoughts give way to mountains and not vice versa in a parodic rewriting of Psalm 83. 8, 'Ibunt de virtute in virtutem, videbitur Deus deorum in Syon' (They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God). Instead of true spiritual ascent and turning through virtue to contemplation of God, we encounter a lyric metonymy of plural thoughts and plural mountains sacred only to Love and designed to arrive at contemplation of Laura alone, 'Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte | mi guida Amor' ('From thought to thought, from mountain to mountain, Love guides me').[26] The multitude of biblical subjects, who single-mindedly approach the one true goal of their desire, is crystallized and inverted in Petrarch's image of the singular desirer who pursues his obsession far and wide.

Petrarch's rambling — apparently unsystematic and beyond his control — is in fact tactical.[27] The poet wants to lose himself in the vastness of the landscape in order to indulge his desire for distraction and utter (albeit quite knowing) delusion to thereby arrive at a single — and singular — image of Laura, 'Ove porge ombra un pino alto od un colle | talor m'arresto, et pur nel primo sasso | disegno co la mente il suo bel viso' ('Where a tall pine or hillside extends shade, there I sometimes stop and in the first stone I see, I portray her lovely face with my mind', ll. 27–29).[28] However, insofar as the 'I' is the source of any and all 'error' (a recurrent Petrarchan term for when the mind mistakes *phantasmata* for reality), it finds that its subjectivity is irreducible and so unsurpassable. The poet keeps returning to himself and losing her as he plunges from the heights of

[25] Aristotle's theory is outlined in Books II and III of the *De anima*. On Petrarch's 'subtle Aristotelianism', see Knecht, '"Invaded by the World"'.

[26] See Ascoli, 'Petrarch's Middle Age', p. 16. As I later discuss, the same passage from Psalm 83 is echoed in 'The Ascent', 'de virtutem in virtutem preclaris gradibus ambulandum est' (p. 836).

[27] On 'tactic' in this sense, see de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. xviii–xx.

[28] This is a striking example of the focused attention required to bring the image up from memory, which the medieval theory of *intentio* (a directed looking, with desire) presumes. See Carruthers's extended discussion in 'Virtue, Intention and the Mind's Eye'.

illusion back into the self's divisive consciousness: 'Poi ch'a me torno, trovo il petto molle | de la pietate; et alor dico: Ahi, lasso, | dove se' giunto! et onde se' diviso!' ('When I come back to myself, I find my breast wet with pity and then I say, "Alas, where have you come to? From what are you separated?"', ll. 30–32). Whether the 'where' at which he has arrived is a physical locus, at the furthest remove from Laura's actual presence, or a mental state that brings home to him her very real absence is uncertain. Either way, he is displaced from the spot on which he was so pleasurably fixated only moments before.

## Divagations in Thought and Language

Petrarch's 'Ascent' similarly presents rambling as something other than pure thoughtless wandering whose pleasures of diversion are enticing but short-lived. The climb begins in eagerness — Petrarch underscores the climbers' youthful impatience, the readiness of their bodies and mind — but it also incorporates a growing awareness of the variance between the allure of the ideal journey and the shadowiness of the real undertaking.[29] The slippage from ideal to real, and light to shadow, continues as Petrarch contrasts his brother Gherardo's swift journey up the mountain with his own prolonged digressions in the valleys below.[30] When, after some delay, Petrarch tells us that he reaches the summit, his arrival does mark a victory over his earlier inclination to err, but it also creates another kind of interval rather than a terminus. Even on the mountaintop, whose sacred associations promise a transcendent contact with the divine, Petrarch's acquired viewpoint is, initially at least, geographical and psychological rather than metaphysical.[31] Glancing back over the landscape he has assailed and mentally surveying the ambiguous aspects of his life he is yet to rise above, he projects his hope of conversion in an indeterminate future that reprises the lyric 'perhaps' ('tempus *forsan* veniet', p. 838; 'The time will *perhaps* come', p. 176). The qualification is telling and prefigures the limits of his soul's extension at the peak when, even coming face to face with Augustine's example,

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[29] On the 'shadowed' nature of Petrarch's journey in 'The Ascent' and elsewhere, see Greene, 'Petrarch *Viator*', pp. 44–46.

[30] Insofar as Gherardo embodies a soul unencumbered by the struggles of the earthly life, and establishes the standard from which Petrarch deviates, his presence has been interpreted as the clearest indication of Petrarch's false dating of the letter (since his brother entered monastic orders at the Carthusian cloister of Montrieux in 1343).

[31] On the mountaintop's sacred associations, and Petrarch's resignification of it, see Cachey, 'Petrarchan Cartographic Writing', pp. 88–91, and Formica and Jakob, 'Commento', pp. 36–37.

Petrarch achieves at most an inverse transcendence: a 'verticality from above looking down — never up'.[32]

The desires that motivate and arise from Petrarch's journey are no less equivocal. While the author frames his narrative according to the teleology of ascent (progress on the vertical axis ideally figuring transcendence from the material to the spiritual plane, and from the active to the contemplative life), and an Augustinian paradigm of conversion (the replacement of the Pauline old man with the new, a concomitant self-transcendence), the letter's forms of desire proceed non-teleologically to disrupt those assumptions.[33] In particular, errancy in desire indicates the resistance of the Petrarchan 'I' to principles of coherence and especially to the demands of the Augustinian *intentio* — the focused stretching of the mind and ordering of the faculties to a particular end as the 'key to knowing', and truly knowing oneself (in God).[34] The Petrarchan experience is, instead, one of *distentio*, the Augustinian capacity for distraction that leads to a dispersal of mind and self within the world, 'in multis per multa' ('drawn many ways by many things').[35] Too many paths are as dangerous as none.

That potential for distraction is evident from the beginning of 'The Ascent' as the author acknowledges the 'cupiditas videndi' (p. 830; desire to see (my translation)) that motivates his climb just to climb and see the view from the summit. This form of desire, while intrinsic to the originality that Petrarch claims for his venture, immediately situates him (and us) in a quandary.[36] Does his *curiositas* channel the classical model of endeavour embodied in Philip of Macedon's example? Or is it the mark of a labile Christian subject already so

[32] Cachey, 'Petrarchan Cartographic Writing', p. 88.

[33] Here I draw upon Manuele Gragnolati's recent notion of a 'form of desire', in *Amor che move* (especially p. 59), inspired by Leo Bersani's work on the interplay of sexuality and aesthetics in *The Freudian Body*. Desire is extended into the text, where its modalities are replicated and further elaborated rather than purified or subsumed.

[34] On Augustinian *intentio*, see Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, especially, pp. 51–52. See also Falkeid, 'Petrarch, Mont Ventoux and the Modern Self', pp. 9–10.

[35] Augustine defines *intentio* and *distentio* against one another in *Confessions* XI. 29, from which this quotation comes. Text and translation are cited from Augustine, *Confessions*, vol. I, ed. and trans by Hammond; vol. II, ed. and trans. by Watts.

[36] As critics note, Petrarch's implicit claim to originality is suspect, not only given the patterns of imitation dominating the letter with regard to Livy and Augustine, but also since John Buridan had assailed Mont Ventoux some time between 1316 and 1334 to carry out scientific experiments. On the latter, see Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, p. 49.

fixated on the delights of the temporal world that he gives in to the sin of inordinate desire, which Augustine had located in a 'lust of the eyes'?[37] What will the role of sense experience be in Petrarch's ascent?[38] And what hope or desire does he have to rein in his (already) errant will if he does not (yet) recognize it as such?

Attention to the range and extent of Petrarch's rambling in 'The Ascent' consolidates the pertinence of these questions insofar as it implies a divarication of desire, understanding, and will.[39] To strive for the summit requires *conatus* — an essentially progressive and forward directed desire — but this dissipates into lassitude and anxiety almost immediately, 'ingentem conatum velox fatigatio subsequitur' (p. 834; 'weariness swiftly followed our extraordinary effort', p. 174). *Cupiditas*, in play from the start, as we have seen, is more constant but, as the prime cause of the Augustinian 'cor inquietum', we should regard it at best as misdirected and at worst as properly destabilizing.[40] Tied to a misrecognition of the object of desire, along with the good contained in it, to follow its lead is to walk blindly and to wander indefinitely in the *regio dissimilitudinis* (region of unlikeness).[41] In 'The Ascent' it incorporates (not by chance) the negative Augustinian 'libido'[42] as well as a more neutral 'ardor'. The latter designates the exiled author's intense nostalgia for his native homeland as he gazes on the hinterland between Italy and France, but also allusively evokes the subjugation of his will to the force of *eros* (his love for Laura, which kept him in and around Avignon) and/or the seductions of fame and glory (as Mazzotta notes, Petrarch's ascent of Mont Ventoux anticipates his imminent ascent of the Capitoline to be crowned poet laureate).[43] Both loves are united

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[37] Cf. Augustine, *Confessions* x. 30, citing 1 John 2. 16. On Augustine's notion of *curiositas* as inordinate love, see De Monticelli's commentary in Augustine, *Confessioni*, p. 668.

[38] For the implications of how we read Petrarch's letter in relation to Aristotelian natural philosophy, see Knecht, '"Invaded by the World"', who argues that 'the language of the Mont Ventoux letter does not advocate turning away from the material world, but rather exemplifies a movement towards rationality based on sensory knowledge' (p. 248).

[39] Cf. Moevs, 'Subjectivity and Conversion in Dante and Petrarch', p. 227.

[40] See Augustine, *Confessions* I. 1. 1: '*inquietum* est *cor nostrum* donec requiescat in te' ('and our hearts are restless until they rest in you').

[41] The notion of the *regio dissimilitudinis* comes from Augustine, *Confessions* VII. 10. 16.

[42] See Augustine, *Confessions* VIII. 5. 10: 'Quippe ex voluntate perversa facta est libido' ('In fact my feelings of sexual desire were formed out of the perversion of my will'), directly echoed in Petrarch's 'Ascent', 'ex quo voluntas illa perversa' (p. 838).

[43] Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 84.

in the Ovidian *cupere* which designates a desire whose force surpasses the will and indicates the key ground into which the letter will stake its engagement with Augustine's *Confessions*, 'velle parum est; cupias, ut re potiaris, oportet' (p. 836; 'To wish is not enough; thou shouldst have a passion to win thy end').[44]

Petrarch errs with gusto, but unvarying error risks monotonous excess, and ultimately self-defeat. The pleasures of detour on the mountain quickly cede to pained and fruitless wandering, to 'taedium' and 'inutilis labor' (p. 834). This is a deviation of a deviation and threatens impasse. As in *RVF* 129, successful rambling is wandering by design. One solution is to bend the line of error, staging a momentary return to the fold, only to depart from it again with renewed vigour. The other is forgetfulness: 'et ecce prioris anfractus oblitus, iterum ad inferiora deicior' (p. 834; 'forgetful of my former wandering [...] I headed downhill [...] once again', p. 174), which gives Petrarch's renewed wandering new promise and new scope (although the ground is the same), until frustration rears its head again and eventually forces a change of perspective, though not necessarily a change of heart: 'Interea, cum iam tedio confectum perplexi pigeret erroris, penitus alta petere disposui' (p. 834; 'Meanwhile, exhausted with weariness and troubled by the confused straying, I was determined to seek the heights', p. 174). Sitting in a valley and urging his thoughts to 'fly upward', the author tells us that he makes 'a leap from the corporeal to the incorporeal' ('Illic a corporeis ad incorporea volucri cogitatione transiliens') as the reality of his situation is now apparently revealed to him. Addressing himself, he states:

> Quod totiens hodie in ascensu montis huius expertus es, id scito et tibi accidere et multis, accedentibus ad beatam vitam; [...] Equidem vita, quam beatam dicimus, celso loco sita est; arcta, ut aiunt, ad illam ducit via. Multi quoque colles intereminent et de virtute in virtutem preclaris gradibus ambulandum est; in summo finis est omnum et vie terminus ad quem peregrinatio nostra disponitur.
> [...]
> Quid ergo te retinet? nimirum nichil aliud, nisi per terrenas et infimas voluptates planior et ut prima fronte videtur, expeditior via; veruntamen, ubi multum erraveris, aut sub pondere male dialti laboris ad ipsius te beate vite culmen oportet ascendere aut in convallibus peccatorum tuorum segnem procumbere. [...] Hec michi cogitatio incredibile dictu est quantum ad ea que restabant et animum et corpus erexerit. (pp. 834–36)

> [What you have experienced so often today in trying to climb this mountain you should know happens to you and to many others as they approach the blessed life.

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[44] The passage comes from Ovid, *Ex Ponto*, III. 1. 35, trans. by Wheeler.

[...] The life we call blessed is certainly located on high, and, as it is said, a very narrow road leads to it. Many hills also intervene and one must proceed from virtue to virtue with very deliberate steps. At the summit lies the end of all things and the limit of the path to which our traveling is directed.

[...]

What detains you? Certainly nothing except the more level and, as it looks at first confrontation, less impeded road of earthly and base pleasures. Nevertheless, after you have wandered widely, you must ascend to the summit of that blessed life burdened by labor ill-deferred or you will sink slowly into the pitfalls of your sins. [...] Incredibly such meditation brought new strength to my mind and to my body and made me willing to face whatever remained.] (pp. 174–75)

This passage is a crucial meditation on the nature of Petrarchan errancy and simultaneously a key moment of allegorical reflection in which the author problematizes the hierarchy between letter and spirit, body and mind. Petrarch makes clear that the landscape that counts is spiritual, but also that the spiritual cannot be extricated from the material at this point; the metaphor he uses to describe the mind's ascent from virtue to virtue is a bit too literal. It recasts the movement of Psalm 83, taken as a model of Christian spiritual ascesis, as discrete stages of a laborious physical challenge, while the 'many intervening hills' echo the erotic landscape of *RVF* 129.[45] As Robert Durling argues, Petrarch also effects an 'inversion of means and ends' insofar as allegorical reflection serves the real ascent, and not vice versa. Mind also serves body, since it is the 'I''s consciousness of the inevitability of its fall, if it does nothing to resist it, which arouses it for the remainder of the climb.[46] In this sense allegorical reflection is a kind of short circuit that re-enters the bounds of the corporeal, which thought had seemed to transcend. It functions practically as an ultimatum ('ascend or perish') but, from the point of view of the physical ascent, is merely a detour (though a necessary one). Nonetheless, with its suggestion that Petrarch's errancy must at some point end, it also constitutes a promise that cannot be fulfilled (because Petrarch refuses to give up his errancy) and denotes the presence of irony.[47] Earthly delights, as the author intimates, prove tenacious, and the call of the world is sufficient, even at the summit, to hold the soul back indefinitely: 'nondum enim in portu sum, ut secures preteritarum

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[45] On the model of Christian ascesis, and Petrarch's departure from it, see Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, pp. 49–50.

[46] Durling, 'The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory', pp. 10–11.

[47] On irony as 'denying or frustrating [the] fulfillment' that allegorical interpretation promises, see Durling, 'The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory', p. 23.

menimerim procellarum' (p. 838; 'not yet being in port I cannot recall in security the storms through which I have passed', p. 176). Most strikingly, insofar as Petrarch is forced to admit that true spiritual conversion happens, 'sine ullo locali motu' (p. 836; without moving anywhere at all),[48] and that the reflections he has at the summit would be more opportune in another place ('quibus alter locus esset oportunior', p. 840), he finds himself (and his text) doubly displaced by positing the promise of redemptive desire or action in an elsewhere of an elsewhere.

## From Rambling to Entanglement, or the Interpolation of Eros

Looking to Petrarch's summit experience itself, which is self-consciously patterned after the scene of Augustine's conversion in *Confessions* VIII (itself modelled on the example of St Anthony),[49] it is soon evident that 'what was a threshold experience for Augustine, may fail to be one for Petrarch'.[50] In 'The Ascent', Petrarch does not display the single resolve of desire and the will necessary for the soul to turn itself over to God, but instead experiences a plurality of desires that are inextricably bound together and draw the soul in different directions (the very mark of the Augustinian *distentio*).[51]

   Amid the manifold paths of errancy lurks the danger of entanglement for Petrarch. As he reaches the summit, he looks back over his struggles of the last ten years and forwards to the many years of struggle that lie ahead. At this point, his rambling mind, unable to overcome the pull of sensual desire, interpolates a line from Ovid's *Amores* at the very moment he would propose to re-enact Augustine's renunciation of carnal love for an unfailing spiritual desire:

[48] My translation. Cf. Augustine, who states (*Confessions* VIII. 8. 19) of the true spiritual homeland that 'et non illuc ibatur navibus aut quadrigis aut pedibus [...] nam non solum ire verum etiam pervenire illuc nihil erat aliud quam velle ire' ('There is no going there by boat or chariot, or on foot [...] for not only heading there but also arriving was simply a matter of having the will').

[49] On the relationship of each model of conversion to the next, and especially the progressive 'de-intensification of the spiritual event', see Durling, 'The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory', pp. 24–25.

[50] Greene, 'Petrarch *Viator*', p. 46.

[51] On failed conversion in Petrarch, see Barolini, 'The Making of a Lyric Sequence', p. 23 n. 11. On the letter's wordplay on 'vertex'/'vortex' as etymologically related to conversion, see Ascoli, 'Petrarch's Middle Age', p. 23.

Dicebam enim ad me ipsum: [...] Tempus forsa veniet, quando eodem quo gesta sunt ordine universa percurram, prefatus illud Augustini tui: 'Recordari volo trans-actas feditates meas et carnales corruptions anime mee, non quod eas amem, sed ut amem te, Deus meus'. Michi quidem multum adhuc ambigui molestique negotii superest. Quod amare solebam, iam non amo; mentior: amo, sed parcius; iterum ecce mentitus sum: amo, sed verecundius, sed tristius; iantandem verum dixi. Sic est enim; amo sed quod non amare amem, quod odisse cupiam; amo tamen, sed invitus, sed coactus, sed mestus et lugens. Et in me ipso versiculi illius famosissimi sententiam miser experior: *Odero, si potero*; *si non, invitus amabo*. (p. 838)

[And I began saying to myself: [...] The time will perhaps come when I shall enu-merate all of these storms that beset my life in their appropriate order, prefacing it with those words of your Augustine, 'I wish to recall all my past foulness and the carnal corruption of my soul not because I love them but because I love you, my God'. As for me, there still remains indeed a great deal that is uncertain and troublesome. What I used to love, I no longer love. I am wrong [lit. I lie], I do love it but too little. There, I am wrong again. I love it but I am too ashamed of it and too sad over it. Now indeed I have said it right. For that is the way it is; I love, but something I would like not to love, and would like to hate. Nevertheless I love, but unwillingly, constrainedly, sorrowfully and mournfully. And in myself I miserably experience the meaning of that very famous verse: 'I shall hate if I can; if not I shall love unwillingly'.] (pp. 176–77)

How can the Petrarchan self conquer the internal Everest of the passions when it carries the phantasms of eros wherever it goes? The meandering and obses-sive repetition of the verb *amare* enacts the process of self-delusion inherent in the will's capitulation to desire, in a soul so enamoured by its own state that, to use Augustine's words, it would rather 'explore' than 'extinguish' the '*morbo concupiscentia*' to which it has become so attached that it cannot imagine a life without it.[52] Not by chance, the line which Petrarch cites from Book III of Ovid's *Amores* comes from the second half of the eleventh chapter, which begins by celebrating the lover's apparent liberation from his 'turpis amor' but soon takes a regressive turn, as the lover is captured again by the lady's corpo-real form, which vanquishes all resistance in him.[53] The parallel with Petrarch's own conflicted desire for Laura in the *RVF* is immediately apparent, a work

[52] Augustine, *Confessions* VIII. 7. 17: 'timebam enim ne me cito exaudires et cito sanares a morbo concupiscentiae, quem malebam expleri quam exstingui' ('For I was afraid that you would hear me straightaway and would cleanse me of the disease of desiring, which I would much rather have explored than expunged!').

[53] See Ovid, *Amores* III, XIa. On Petrarch's relationship to Ovid, also in relation to Augustine, see Enterline, 'Embodied Voices'.

in which the poet struggles to reconcile his love of a mortal creature with his love for the Creator. Laura never is named in 'The Ascent', however, and it is as though the shadowy materiality she possesses in *RVF* 129 (and elsewhere in the *RVF*) were subsumed within the author's own 'voluntas [...] perversa' (p. 838; 'perverse inclination', p. 177), which could equally encompass his desire for poetic fame and glory.

Whatever the object of Petrarch's disordered passion, its continuing hold over the speaker's will threatens to derail any genuinely conversional impulse he experiences. The conflict of the split will introduced with the quotation from Ovid's *Amores* actually recalls Augustine's psychomachia prior to his own conversion. But Petrarch is far from experiencing Augustine's agony in the garden. Rather than Augustine's repeated cry, 'I must change, this has to be the moment',[54] Petrarch asks himself, 'Can I change? Is this really the moment? Would I want it to be? Mustn't I rather accept that it cannot be?':

> Si tibi forte contingeret per alia duo lustra volatilem hanc vitam producere, tantumque pro rata temporis ad virtutem accedere quantum hoc biennio, per congressum nove contra veterem voluntatis [...] quadragesimo etatis anno mortem oppetere et illud residuum vite in senium abeuntis equa mente negligere? (pp. 838–40)

> [If it chanced that this transitory life would be extended another ten years for you, and you were to approach as far toward virtue as during the past two years — though your new inclination does battle with your old [...] could you not then go to meet your death in your fortieth year or disregard calmly the remainder of a life which is vanishing into old age?] (p. 177)

Petrarch merely reinforces his error in denying that he has the freedom to make a definitive choice at this point. Not only is his will made passive by its deferral, it is also divided. As Augustine later writes, so long as the will is full, 'willing' is 'the same as already doing', but if it is still striving to be full, it cannot yet be so.[55] Nonetheless, striving for Augustine is still a sign of a true desire to repent and thus the beginning of spiritual progress.[56] Petrarch's moment of introspection, while imitative of struggle, lacks the striving. He is not consumed by his experience, and so he is not reborn through it either. Later, Petrarch states that

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[54] E.g. in Augustine, *Confessions* VIII. 11. 25: 'dicebam enim apud me intus, "ecce modo fiat, modo fiat," et cum verbo iam ibam in placitum' ('In my heart I was saying, "Look, let it happen now, let it happen now!" and as I was saying it, I was coming to the point of decision').

[55] Augustine, *Confessions* VIII. 8. 20, 'et ipsum velle iam facere erat'.

[56] Cf. Zeeman, *'Piers Plowman' and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, pp. 42–44, on Augustine's view of sin as enabling 'forms of renewal' via self-knowledge.

there is nothing that can hold a soul back from reaching God if it genuinely desires him.[57] If God is still far away, that is because he does not desire him enough; conversion is a mirage or a fantasy since there is no framework within which it can make sense. Like absolution from sin, one cannot convert pre-emptively, and to delay converting is to carry on sinning. Petrarch would rather enjoy the transgression and then repent *in extremis*, but he never does so fully.

The essential passivity of the Petrarchan self in this moment dovetails strikingly with the matter of his lyric text where, by contrast, there is barely room to imagine a domain beyond desire's impulsions and certainly no mention of an ethical imperative from which to stray. In this sense, *RVF* 129 enacts a state of derangement, only tenuously held in check by the poem's form. Since the lover's movement in space follows the motions of the unquiet heart and the perturbations of his soul, everything is subject to change, which is to say that it obeys the laws of matter:

> Se 'n solitaria pioggia, riva o fonte,
> se 'nfra due poggi siede ombrosa valle,
> ivi s'acqueta l'alma sbigottita;
> et come Amor l'envita
> or ride or piange or teme or s'assecura
> e'l volto, che lei segue ov'ella il mena,
> si turba et rasserena
> et in un essere picciol tempo dura. (ll. 4–11)

[If there is on some solitary slope a river or spring, or between two peaks a shady valley, there my frightened soul is quieted. And, as love leads it [the soul] on, now it laughs, now weeps, now fears, now is confident: and my face, which follows wherever my soul leads, is clouded and made clear again, and remains but a short time in any one state.]

Under the force of love, gathering and dispersion, affective centring and decentring occur together. The thinking, feeling subject is pure *passio* in the Aristotelian sense: a locus of sensation and a site of psycho-affective motility that interacts constantly with (and reacts to) the world around it, which it also internalizes. The precariousness of the subject's state leaves it at the mercy of affective reversals, which means open to unexpected joys when the purely contingent panders to the will, and the soul, somewhere between amazed and

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[57] Cf. 'que crux, quis carcer, quis equuleus deberet terrere animum appropinquantem Deo?' (p. 842; 'what cross, what prison, what torture rack should frighten the mind drawing nearer to God?', p. 179).

dismayed, finds peace in a moment of contemplative stillness. Rambling in this sense absorbs the true nature of errancy as objectless and casual wandering, yet also masks a more targeted drift, which has an efficient cause (Love) and, as the poem progresses, a final cause as well (Laura's hallucinatory presence).[58] It involves letting the desiring mind ('mente vaga' — also 'errant', 'distracted') stray just far enough to stumble across the hallucinatory image of Laura in the landscape before contracting, and holding it fixed, in an attempt to bind it to its 'error' as long as possible:

> Ma mentre tener fiso
> posso al primo pensier la mente vaga,
> et mirar lei et oblïar me stesso,
> sento Amor sì da presso
> che del suo proprio error l'alma s'appaga
> in tante parti e sì bella la veggio
> che, se l'error durasse, altro non cheggio. (ll. 33–39)

[But as long as I can hold my yearning mind fixed on the first thought, and look at her and forget myself, I feel love so close by that my soul is satisfied by its own deception. In so many places and so beautiful I see her, that, if the deception should last, I ask for no more.]

The subject would like to pass out of itself in an experience of lyric and imaginative ecstasy, to relinquish its consciousness sufficiently to lend autonomy, and so life, to its object. However the psychological 'error' involved dissipates under the force of truth, revealing the irreducibility of the self that is its source:

> et quanto in piú selvaggio
> loco mi trovo e'n piú deserto lido,
> tanto piú bella il mio pensier l'adombra.
> Poi quando il vero sgombra
> quel dolce error, pur lí medesmo assido
> me freddo, pietra morta in pietra viva,
> in guisa d'uom che pensi et pianga et scriva. (ll. 46–52)

[and in whatever wildest place and most deserted shore I find myself, so much the more beautiful does my thought shadow her forth. Then when the truth dispels that sweet deception, right there in the same place I sit down, cold, a dead stone on the living rock, like a man who thinks and weeps and writes.]

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[58] Cf. Holzhey, 'Core Project "Errans"': 'embracing error remains a challenging and paradoxical thought, unless one keeps the meaning of "erring" as a directionless wandering governed by chance rather than efficient or final causes'.

Existing only in the 'alienated domain of the simulacra', the Petrarchan 'I' loses substance (it is but a 'seeming-being', 'in guisa d'uom') and yet is reified in what remains, a thing that 'thinks and weeps and writes'.[59] That which the mind shadows forth ('adombra') cannot withstand the inexorable flow of time ('Poi...'; 'then...') and is subsumed into it. The rhyme word Petrarch chooses is 'sgombra' (dispels): truth unburdens him of his error, and thus empties him of his desired (and desiring) excess. 'Sgombrare' would normally imply the removal of some hindrance, but the error while it lasts is not experienced as a constraining disorder but a liberating one, since it unleashes the imagination. To be encumbered by the 'dolce error' is to be momentarily free of the self and its divisive consciousness. Objectively speaking, however, the results of this imaginative extension cannot endure, and the 'I' finds that it is more present to itself than ever.

## Fetishizing Augustine, or Petrarch's Fascination with the Text

An equally revealing textual dynamic, centred on the self's ultimate irreducibility, emerges in 'The Ascent' at the moment at which Petrarch takes up his copy of the *Confessions*, 'visum est michi *Confessionum* Augustini librum [...] inspicere' (p. 840; 'it occurred to me to look into the *Book of Confessions* of Saint Augustine', pp. 177–78). We think reading Augustine will lead to a certain kind of experience for Petrarch — something akin to Augustine's own reading of St Paul — but it leads somewhere else. Indeed Petrarch's summit experience is less about a turning of the will to convert than about the state of fascination with a text and what it can allow. Ultimately, it points to the author's entanglement in language and potentially to his captivation by the spectacle of his own creations, his art.

Still stationed at the summit, and savouring the transgressive pleasure that comes from alternating his gaze on the beauty of the physical world and contemplating what lies beyond it, Petrarch picks up his beloved copy of the *Confessions* and, opening it to a random page, reads the first sentence that catches his eye: 'Et eunt homines admirari alta montium et ingentes fluctus maris et latissimos lapsus fluminum et occeani ambitum et giros siderum, et relinquunt se ipsos' (p. 840; 'And they go admire the summits of mountains and the vast billows of the sea and the broadest rivers and the expanses of the ocean and the revolutions of the stars and they overlook themselves', p. 178).[60] Abruptly

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[59] Ascoli, 'Petrarch's Middle Age', p. 15.

[60] Augustine, *Confessions* x. 8. 15.

disowning the mountain which has so far been the focus of his narrative, he turns his gaze on himself: 'Tunc vero montem satis vidisse contentus, in me ipsum interiores oculos reflexi, et ex illa hora non fuit qui me loquentem audiret donec ad ima pervenimus; satis michi tacit negotii verbum illud attulerat' (pp. 840–42; Then indeed having seen enough of the mountain I turned my inner eyes within, and from that moment there was no one who heard me speak until we arrived back at the foot of the mountain, since that passage had already given me enough to do).[61]

This could be the moment when, in true Augustinian fashion, the *vox corporis* is finally silenced to give way to true communion with God beyond carnal utterance, in the unfallen realm of the 'interior word'.[62] Yet if Petrarch abstracts Augustine's words he also fetishizes them, taking the reference to the self so fully to the letter that he struggles to move beyond it. As Jill Robbins states, 'Petrarch's long-desired vantage point, which he had identified as being *as* Augustine's, will be *in* Augustine': rather than read scripture and turn his soul over to God, he reads Augustine's *Confessions* and turns inward on himself.[63] His devotion is to a text, or to language, rather than to an act of the will. Turning Augustine's phrase over and over in his mind until it becomes all-absorbing, Petrarch transforms the imperative not to forget the self into a way of meditating only upon it.

Again the question of perspective is paramount. Petrarch reads partially; he excerpts Augustine's words from their original context and thereby alters their meaning.[64] In *Confessions* X, Augustine had sought to contemplate the power (as well as limitations) of memory in order to know God better. At the beginning of Chapter 7, he asks, 'quis est ille super caput animae meae?' ('Who is he that is above the top of my soul?'). With this paradigm of verticality and transcendence, Augustine means to demonstrate how nothing, not even the intellect, can contain God nor can the mind, made divine by God's creation of it, contain itself. Clarifying, in *Confessions* X. 8, that the mountains of which he speaks are the ones that he sees only in his mind's eye (and not, as Petrarch's narrower reading could suggest, with the external eye alone), Augustine stands amazed at his ability to retain, and call up at will, those images stored in his

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[61] Trans. adapted from Barney, p. 178.

[62] Augustine's discussion of the 'interior word' is in *De trinitate*, XV.

[63] Robbins, 'Petrarch Reading Augustine', p. 538; italics in the original.

[64] On Petrarch's partial reading of Augustine, see Robbins, 'Petrarch Reading Augustine', pp. 543–45, and Capodivacca, '"Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte"', pp. S55–S56.

memory that derive from, but are also distinct from, sense experience. Insofar as his mind orders and gathers the images together, so he is able to reason, speak, and ultimately transcend his facticity to embrace the non-contingent, eternal world beyond.[65] Petrarch retains Augustine's acute awareness of the limits of the created world and the necessity to look for meaning within himself; however, what he finds is not the path of self-transcendence that leads to God, but the prospect of further and potentially limitless diversions which make the errant self at once irreducible and resolutely unstable in its pursuit of pleasure, 'et hoc: quotocuique accidet, ut ab hac semita, vel durarum metu rerum vel mollium cupidine, non divertat?' (p. 842; 'And this thought also occurred to me: how many are there who will not divert the mind from this path either from fear of hardships or desire for pleasures?', p. 179).

For the true rambler, a peak is not an ending; there is only a continuation of wandering. Beyond the top of Petrarch's soul lies not God but more words, and other deviations. Tellingly, Petrarch's final perspective on the summit (at once of the mountain and the self ) is the view from below that only descent affords, 'Quotiens, putas, illo die, rediens et in tergum versus, cacumen montis aspexi!' (p. 842; 'How often, do you think, upon returning home that day, did I turn back to look at the summit of the mountain!', p. 179). His thoughts remain, even at the end of the journey (including the journey of writing), 'vagi' and 'instabilis': liable to wander, lose direction, and be overturned. He prays that he might convert them to one thought alone, 'bonum, verum, certum, stabile' (p. 844; 'good, true, certain, stable', p. 180), but that prayer — the text's ultimate mirage — remains unanswered. That illusion is the limit of Petrarch's 'Ascent', and it is its power as literature to simultaneously proffer and withhold its sense of an ending. On the one hand, the author's rambling has led him nowhere, to 'confusion, darkness and restless emptiness — or [to] nothing'.[66] On the other, it has brought him to a place we can think of only as textual, or poetic, where the promise of an Augustinian *intentio* gives way to Petrarch's refusal to order the self's discontinuous experiences or to close the question of his desire. His art of rambling comes down to this: a straying within the self that is as anxiously pleasurable as it is perverse, which transforms the ambivalences of error into a space in which to linger indefinitely.[67]

[65] Cf. Ascoli, 'Petrarch's Middle Age', p. 37. Augustine speaks of these things in *Confessions* x. 9.

[66] Falkeid, 'Petrarch, Mont Ventoux and the Modern Self', p. 13.

[67] Cf. Greene, 'Petrarch *Viator*', p. 56.

In Petrarch's canzone 129, too, errancy culminates in a moment of suspension that is synonymous with poetry. Having been pulled up to the highest peak by the intensity of his desire, the poet first surveys the great swathe of land and air separating him from Laura and then, turning inward on himself, says:

> Poscia fra me pian piano:
> Che sai tu, lasso! forse in quella parte
> or di tua lontananza si sospira.
> Et in questo penser l'alma respira.
>
> Canzone, oltra quell'alpe
> là dove il ciel è più sereno et lieto
> mi rivedrai sovr'un ruscel corrente,
> ove l'aura si sente
> d'un fresco et odorifero laureto.
> Ivi è 'l mio cor, et quella che 'l m'invola;
> qui veder pôi l'imagine mia sola. (ll. 62–72)

[Then to myself softly: 'What do you know, wretch? Perhaps over there someone is sighing now because of your absence'. And in this thought my soul breathes.

Song, beyond those Alps, where the sky is more clear and happy, you shall see me again beside a running stream, where the breeze from a fresh and fragrant laurel can be felt: there is my heart, and she who steals it from me; here you can see only my image.]

In this last passage, thought and language divagate sufficiently to enable Petrarch to use the verb *sapere* (to know) to negate knowledge and indulge fantasy. Through a productively masochistic gesture, in which the speaker exacerbates the distance dividing him from Laura, rather than collapsing it, the 'I' gains some perverse satisfaction from absenting itself.[68] Mind crosses into body and intellect into affect as *this* rambling thought ('*questo* penser') draws mind, body, and soul into a pneumatic circle that unites sighs, breath, desire, and air.[69] This thought's effects are physiological, and they elide distance: through them the soul breathes and the breeze (a synecdoche for the beloved) is felt, as the poet imagines that across the way Laura might be having a reciprocal passional

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[68] On the notion of productive masochism, see Bersani, *The Freudian Body*, especially pp. 39–50.

[69] On the role of 'pneuma' (Latin *spiritus*), first theorized in Aristotle's *De generatione animalium*, in relation to the medieval physiology of love, see Webb, *The Medieval Heart*; on sighs, a 'quasi-chemical mix of desire and air', see Lombardi, *The Wings of the Doves*, pp. 42–43.

response to her perception of his absence.[70] Poem and thought are, by this stage, indistinguishable. The deictic 'this', which has meaning only in relation to the speaking subject, is the mark, as well as the limit, of Petrarch's 'erotic intention' and constitutes the poem's most important 'event' of desire since it is uniquely productive of an imagined presence (the poem's present of desire, its enunciatory breath).[71]

It is perhaps too productive. The culminating landscape of the poem ends up overdetermined with respect to Laura, who is present as both breeze and laurel and whose effects on the 'I' are divisive rather than expansive. By the *congedo*, all thinking is over, but the subject emerges as doubly irreducible. The part of the 'I' that remains with Laura is only heart; beyond that is only image: 'Ivi è'l mio cor, et quella che'l m'invola; | qui veder pôi l'imagine mia sola' (ll. 71–72; 'there is my heart, and she who steals it from me; here you can see only my image'). In each case, the poet loses, and in each case he gains by having lost (she steals his heart, he yields it willingly; he is partly full, partly empty). The 'here' and 'there' that deictically frame the last two lines of the poem redirect every movement, and every thought, to the irreducible dichotomy between them, which is no less than the space of the poem itself. Compared to the 'I''s earlier rambling, the effect of this bifurcation is overwhelmingly static, but in that very stasis rests the promise of infinite desire.

## Ramifications

If *RVF* 129, like 'The Ascent', is an experiment in how far its author can push the boundaries of his errancy, its modes of divagation are somewhat different. Petrarch's lyric 'I' wanders *within* rather than *from* any particular place or path; it does not so much swerve or turn out of the way as revolve endlessly upon its already errant course. In terms of what it means to ramble, the lyric poem embodies an experience more of 'ontological deracination', for a soul cut off from its metaphysical ground, than the more metaphysically embedded deviations of 'The Ascent', which emphasize error primarily as the erroneousness of sin that comes from losing sight of the *summum bonum*.[72] In the poem loss is, however, more keenly felt and ultimately embraced, since the poem's forms of desire are actually energized by Laura's non-availability. Poetry, as error or errancy, keeps

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[70]  See Stierle, 'A Manifesto of New Singing', p. 100.

[71]  Langer, 'Petrarch's Singular Love Lyric', p. 71.

[72]  See Moevs, 'Subjectivity and Conversion in Dante and Petrarch', pp. 226–27.

the promise of erotic satisfaction in play, just beyond the horizon, and as such opens up a paradoxical space for pleasure within the landscape of the 'I''s destitution. Even more than an experiment in the illusions of which the mind is capable, we can view *RVF* 129 as a study of the bounds of deprivation that the subject is willing to suffer, over and again, for the prospective fulfilment of desire in another space and time. If deviation in 'The Ascent' occurs effortlessly but is embraced more anxiously, in the poem Petrarch's wandering seems less effortless but more extensive. He never can ramble far enough to lose himself, but his art is an arresting experiment in the dynamics of subjective dislocation.

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# Desire for the Good: Jean de Meun, Boethius, and the 'homme devisé en deuz'

Philip Knox

> Mout est chetis et fols naïs
> qui croit que ci soit ses païs:
> n'est pas vostre païs en terre,
> ce peut l'en bien des clers enquerre,
> qui Boece *de Confort* lisent
> et les sentences qui la gisent,
> donc granz biens aus gens lais feroit
> qui bien le leur translateroit. (ll. 5003–10)

[Whoever believes that this is his home country is a wretched and stupid fool. Your home country is not on earth, as can well be found out from the clerks who interpret Boethius's *Consolation* and the wisdom which lies therein. If someone were to translate it well for laypeople he would do them a great deal of good.][1]

Perhaps the most prominent of the many texts whose echoes reverberate through Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose* (*c*. 1270–85) is Boethius's sixth-century *Consolation of Philosophy*.[2] Near the beginning of his work,

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I am grateful to my co-editors for their useful comments on this essay.

[1] All quotations are from Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. by Lecoy. All unattributed translations are my own.

[2] For the internal evidence for the dating of Jean's section of the *Rose*, see Guillaume de Lorris

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a continuation of Guillaume de Lorris's earlier unfinished poem, Jean uses the voice of the personified Raison (Reason), quoted above, to develop one of his many paraphrases of Boethius into a wider, perhaps self-reflexive statement about the benefits of rendering the *Consolation* into the vernacular.[3] Later in life, as if to answer the wishes of his own allegorical character, Jean would go on to produce *Li Livres de confort*, a prose translation of the entirety of Boethius's text, which stands out among the many medieval French versions of the *Consolation* in its fidelity and sensitivity to the Latin original.[4] In this essay, I will examine some of the preoccupations that surface in Jean's encounters with Boethius, both as translator and as poet. Although I limit myself here to a discussion of Jean's interactions with a single author, these interactions should be recognized as forming only a small part of Jean's complex intellectual landscape, including the huge range of ancient and medieval texts that no doubt mediated and inflected his understanding of Boethius.[5] Principally, I will be concerned

and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. by Lecoy, I, pp. vi–viii. Lecoy himself inclines towards the narrower range 1269–78. For Jean's use of Boethius in the *Rose*, see Langlois, *Origines et sources du 'Roman de la Rose'*, pp. 136–38; Cherniss, 'Jean de Meun's Reson and Boethius'; Ott, 'Jean de Meun und Boethius'; Kay, 'Woman's Body of Knowledge'; Heller-Roazen, *Fortune's Faces*, pp. 70–78, 103–09; Huot, *Dreams of Lovers and Lies of Poets*, pp. 31–54, 61–63.

[3] Cf. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, I, pr. 5, 9–12, for the passage Reason is imitating here. David Hult suggests that Reason's reference to a vernacular translation of the *Consolation* here could be an ironic reference to the *Rose* itself; Hult, 'Poetry and the Translation of Knowledge in Jean de Meun', pp. 20–21.

[4] For the medieval French tradition of translations of the *Consolation*, see Dwyer, *Boethian Fictions* and Cropp, 'Boethius in Medieval France', an expansion of Cropp, 'The Medieval French Tradition'.

[5] Standing between Boethius and Jean's *Rose* is an important group of intermediary texts that will not be directly addressed here: the 'Neoplatonic' allegories of the twelfth century, particularly Bernardus Silvestris's *Cosmographia* and Alain de Lille's *Complaint of Nature*. For this tradition, and Jean's position in it, see Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century*; Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision*. See also Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*. For Jean's familiarity with contemporary, thirteenth-century philosophical debates, see Paré, Le 'Roman de la rose' et la *Scolastique courtoise*; Paré, *Les Idées et les lettres au XIIIe siècle*; Hilder, *Der scholastische Wortschatz bei Jean de Meun*. In recent years this relationship has received renewed attention: see Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry*, pp. 45–73; Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris*, pp. 359–74; Franklin-Brown, *Reading the World*, pp. 183–214; Zeeman, 'Philosophy in Parts', pp. 219–25; Nievergelt, 'Impropriety, Imposition, and Equivocation'; Robertson, *Nature Speaks*, pp. 127–76; Morton, *The 'Roman de la rose' in its Philosophical Context*. These issues will be addressed in a forthcoming collection of essays edited by Jonathan Morton and Marco Nievergelt with John Marenbon, *The 'Roman de la rose' and Thirteenth-Century Thought*.

with how Jean responds to a central and difficult aspect of Boethius's thought: the metaphysical notion of the inherent goodness of being and, relatedly, the natural desire of all creation for 'the good'. I begin by examining how Jean's prologue to his translation of the *Consolation*, with its curious and fleeting reference to the 'homme devisé en deuz' (man divided in two),[6] seems to reveal a particular interest in these ideas, before investigating in more detail a potentially problematic implication that emerges from Boethius's text: that the human and animal urge to reproduce sexually is an expression of the fundamental desire for the good.[7] In Jean's *Rose*, the potential tensions that attend this notion are amplified, and brought perhaps to a breaking point, as this natural desire for the good is shown to be in conflict with the instabilities of the individual sexual impulse. I want to argue that this aspect of Jean's *Rose* can be understood as a kind of thought experiment — a way of exploring the furthest ramifications of an idea without attempting to resolve its contradictions. In using the term 'thought experiment', I do not wish to suggest that the processes of literature or fiction are identical to the techniques of modern-day analytical philosophers.[8] For me, the term gains its usefulness — as a heuristic tool or perhaps simply as a provocation — by suggesting a realm in which the demonstrative and the imaginative overlap and interfere.[9] As will be seen, the *Consolation* itself is an elusive and far from straightforward text; however, the licence Jean allows himself as the poet of the *Rose*, compared to the fastidious closeness of his prose translation in the *Livres de confort*, seems to suggest that for him poetry had special rights over the demonstrative truths of philosophy, even if, in other, more strictly constrained contexts, these truths must go uncontested.

For scholars interested in Jean de Meun's thought and its development, there is perhaps something disappointing about the prologue to his *Livres de confort*.

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[6] Quotations of Jean's *Livres de confort* are from 'Boethius' *De Consolatione* by Jean de Meun', ed. by Dedeck-Héry.

[7] For an insightful analysis of some of these ideas in Boethius, Jean de Meun, and a range of other texts, see White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness in a Medieval Literary Tradition*, a study to which this is essay is indebted. Fuller discussions of Boethius's metaphysics are cited below.

[8] For a discussion of the history of the term 'thought experiment' and the kinds of texts that should reasonably be admitted into this category, see Roux, 'Introduction'.

[9] In his contribution to this volume, John Marenbon analyses a number of passages in philosophical texts that might be considered 'thought experiments'. Marenbon concludes by arguing that the term is ultimately unhelpful, but his study remains germane to my interests here. My own thinking about the relationship between poetry and other discourses has been influenced by Zeeman, 'The Schools Give a License to Poets'.

Some decades ago, Roberto Crespo identified the unannounced source of this prologue as the proemium to a commentary on the *Consolation* by William of Aragon that survives in three known manuscripts.[10] Since the same principles of fastidious closeness that characterize his translation of the *Consolation* can also be seen in his use of William's text, Jean's prologue does not in fact offer, as some scholars have supposed, a transparent window onto 'how he read the Latin work'.[11] Apart from a brief exordium in which he dedicates the work to King Philippe le Bel, and apologizes for any looseness in his translation of Boethius's Latin (ll. 13–18), Jean renders William of Aragon's *accessus* almost word-for-word. In the body of his translation of the *Consolation*, there is little or no evidence that Jean drew on William of Aragon's commentary, and some evidence that at times he drew on the more widely disseminated commentary of William of Conches to elucidate details.[12] And yet, the fact that Jean selected William of Aragon's *accessus* shows that it must have resonated with his concerns in some way. Later I will offer my own view on what may have motivated this choice.

The arresting phrase 'homme devisé en deuz', taken as the subtitle of this chapter, occurs towards the end of the prologue, as Jean translates William's comments on Boethius's representation of man's conflicting desires for both sensible and intelligible goods:

[10] Crespo, 'Il prologo alla traduzione della *Consolatio Philosophiae*', p. 55. Crespo's article includes a transcription of William's prologue. For a fuller (but not complete) edition of William's commentary, see William of Aragon, 'Commentary on Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae', ed. by Terbille, ii, 1–148; all quotations of William's Latin will be from this edition. A speculative biography of the commentator is put forward by Terbille, i, 2–25; note, however, that Terbille accepts a manuscript colophon date of 1335 as the date of the composition of the text. Although Terbille does not make this point, a date of 1335 would make it impossible for Jean de Meun to have translated the text. Peter Dronke, indeed, argues that the William of Aragon *accessus* was in actuality a Latin translation of Jean de Meun's French prologue (*Verse with Prose from Petronius to Dante*, p. 125 n. 40). But when other works attributed to William of Aragon are so close in phraseology and source material to the Boethius *accessus* and commentary (cf. William of Aragon, 'Commentary on Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae', ed. by Terbille, i, 6), it seems much more likely that Jean translated the Latin into French, and that the date of 1335 relates to the date of copying rather than the date of composition. For further discussion of William of Aragon's commentary and a translation of selected extracts, see *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Minnis and Scott, pp. 319–21, 328–36. See also Nauta, 'The *Consolation*', pp. 266–67.

[11] Cherniss, 'Jean de Meun's Reson and Boethius', p. 680.

[12] See Minnis, 'Aspects of the Medieval French and English Traditions', pp. 315–34. For more on the medieval commentaries on the *Consolation*, see Nauta, 'The *Consolation*'; Marenbon, *Boethius*, pp. 172–76.

Donc selonc ce est homme devisé en deuz, ce est a savoir en homme tourmenté et demené par passions sensibles et en homme devinement ellevé es biens entendibles. Et pour ce que seule philosophie nous ellieve par le don de dieu aus biens entendibles, Boeces establist et represente soi en partie de homme troublé et tourmenté et demené par passions sensibles et establist philosophie en partie de homme ellevé et ensuivant les biens entendibles. (ll. 115–21)

[Thus according to this, man is divided in two, that is to say into the man tormented and agitated by the sensible passions and into the man divinely elevated to the intelligible goods. And because only philosophy elevates us by the gift of God to the intelligible goods, Boethius establishes and represents himself in the place of a man troubled and tormented and agitated by sensible passions and establishes Philosophy in the place of a man who is elevated and who follows the intelligible goods.]

unde secundum hoc homo in duo dividitur, in hominem scilicet passionibus sensibilibus agitatum et in hominem bonis intelligibilibus divinitus elevatum. quia vero sola philosophia ad bona intelligibilia dono Dei nos elevat, Boethius in parte hominis turbati et passionibus sensibilibus agitati se statuit, et in parte hominis bona intellegibilia sequentis Philosophiam inducit. (pp. 5–6)

[So, according to this argument, humanity is divided into two groups: that part of mankind which is motivated by passions rooted in the senses, and that which is elevated by intelligible goods through divine influence. But because philosophy alone raises us to the level of intelligible goods, through God's bounteous gift, Boethius has given himself the part of a man who is troubled and motivated by passions rooted in the senses, and introduces the figure of Philosophy in the part of a man who follows intelligible goods.][13]

The extreme closeness of Jean's translation allows for the survival of some ambiguities in William's language that are ironed out in Minnis and Scott's English version, which I quote above. While they take William's *homo* to refer to the species of man (suggesting 'humanity is divided into two groups' for *homo in duo dividitur*), Jean's 'homme [est] devisé en deuz' preserves the available reading that it is the *individual* man who is divided in two, split internally between the desire for the true good, on the one hand, and the desire for false goods on the other.[14] The precise meaning of the word *homo* (Jean's *homme*) thus seems particularly important: Does it refer to the species or the individual — humanity or a single man? The reading '[the individual] man is divided in two', avail-

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[13] Trans. in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Minnis and Scott, p. 331.

[14] Cf. Dronke, *Verse with Prose from Petronius to Dante*, p. 41.

able in both the Latin and French texts, does not suggest that some portion of mankind has arrived at the blissfully stable position of true understanding. Instead, it suggests something that is in some ways more troubling: an internal struggle, a division between the desire for sensible and intelligible goods that cannot be easily overcome. From this perspective, the man 'divided in two' might suggest St Paul's view of a more radical split between contrary internal forces — the 'law of the spirit' and the 'law of the members' (Romans 7. 23).[15]

But if the notion of a man 'divided in two' raises the idea that all of mankind is essentially fallen — inherently damaged by the *concupiscentia carnis*, as Augustine had suggested in the century before Boethius — William of Aragon, and Jean de Meun in translating him, does not seem to wish to emphasize such a view.[16] Rather than insisting that the *Consolation* should be read as an allegory of intrinsic self-division, William avoids the difficult implications of the question by concentrating on another aspect of the text, one of Boethius's most central arguments: all things are by nature good in as much as they participate in being, and the instinctive desire of all things to perpetuate their being demonstrates their natural desire for the good. Beginning his prologue by citing an idea he claims to find in Book I of Aristotle's *Politics*, 'all things desire the good' ('omnia appetunt bonum'),[17] William is explicit about the importance of this notion:

> sequitur quod, cum omnia entia sunt bona, quod omnia appetunt bonum ipsum ut suam perfectionem aut suae perfectionis salutem. (p. 1)

> [it thus follows, since all beings are good, that everything desires the same good, that is its own perfection, or the preservation of its perfection.][18]

Jean's translation is precise in its rendering of William's Latin:

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[15] For a discussion of the development of Paul's attitudes to sex, see Brown, *The Body and Society*, pp. 33–64.

[16] For Augustine, the fact that the human sexual organs do not respond to the will is evidence of the enduring bodily effects of the Fall (*City of God*, xiv. 24). See also Brown, *The Body and Society*, pp. 387–427. Some of the details of Augustine's thought in this area were developed in his attacks on the Pelagian bishop Julian of Eclanum, who believed that desire or *concupiscentia* was a natural and sinless phenomenon; see Clark, 'Generation, Degeneration, Regeneration'.

[17] Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, I. 1, 1252a3–4: 'for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which they think good'; *Nichomachean Ethics*, I. 1, 1094a. All references to Aristotle are to *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Barnes.

[18] My translation, but compare *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Minnis and Scott, p. 328.

il s'ensuit que, comme toutez les chosez qui sont soient bonnes, que toutez chosez desirent ce meismes qui est biens, si comme leur perfection ou le sauvement de leur perfection. (ll. 24–27)

The desire for sensible rather than intelligible goods, in William's summary of Boethius's position, is the result of an error in thought, a simple misrecognition, rather than a fundamental interior split caused by an inherently warped desire. To understand the importance of what William and Jean are saying here, I must turn in more detail to the complexities of the *Consolation* itself.

One difficulty with the attempt to trace the afterlife of the *Consolation of Philosophy* is that scholars today are by no means united in their opinions on how Boethius's text should itself be read.[19] As a fictional dialogue between a personified Philosophy and a seemingly semi-autobiographical narrator, the *Consolation* raises questions of interpretation that might apply to any philosophical treatise in dialogue form — and yet in Boethius's text these questions seem at once more urgent and more difficult. Since the tenth century, commentators have recognized that Philosophy's frame of reference is almost entirely non-Christian,[20] and in recent decades scholars have suggested that Philosophy seems to undo some of her own arguments at the end of Book V; the idea that she represents a limited perspective seems to be becoming more widespread.[21] More radically, Joel Relihan has read the *Consolation* in the tradition of Menippean satire to suggest that Philosophy is to some extent undermined throughout the text; what she says must be interpreted ironically if we are to get

[19] An enormous amount has been written about the medieval reception of Boethius; see Courcelle, *La 'Consolation de Philosophie' dans la tradition littéraire*, and the bibliographies in Kaylor, *The Medieval 'Consolation of Philosophy'* and Phillips, 'Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius'.

[20] In the tenth century Bovo of Corvey criticized Boethius for the absence of Christian teaching in the *Consolation*; see Courcelle, *La 'Consolation de Philosophie' dans la tradition littéraire*, pp. 292–95. But if Philosophy's words remain for the most part consistent with pagan philosophy rather than Christianity, at III, pr. 12, ll. 64–65 she does seem to paraphrase Wisdom 8. 1. Chadwick, *Boethius*, pp. 237–38, argues that the narrator is surprised and delighted to find Philosophy quoting a scriptural text.

[21] Marenbon, *Boethius*, pp. 145–46. See also Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, pp. 47–50, for a discussion of various scholarly attitudes to the *Consolation* and for Marenbon's own reading (p. 51) that 'the author Boethius deliberately leaves his carefully contrived arguments in tension'. For the problems raised by Philosophy's arguments at the end of Book V, see also Relihan, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*, pp. 16–17; for a clear discussion of arguments and potential problems that are raised, see Sharples, 'Fate, Prescience and Free Will'.

towards the truth of Boethius's intended meaning.[22] But if Boethius sometimes asks us to read Philosophy as something like a literary character whose position can be called into question — as a speaking embodiment of a particular form of rational thought — she is also allowed to voice opinions that we know, from other works, to be Boethius's own, and the vast majority of what she says is reasonable, self-consistent, and compatible with Christianity. In the end, we are forced to approach Philosophy as the text presents her: neither a self-evidently absurd personification of reason unenlightened by revelation, nor an entirely straightforward mouthpiece for the Christian thinker Boethius. In what follows I present some of Philosophy's ideas as Boethius's, but the problem of how these ideas should be read remains in the background and is beyond my abilities to resolve here. I will begin by tracing the broad outlines of a complex notion that appears in the *Consolation* and elsewhere in Boethius's writings, before focusing on a detail that, I argue, particularly exercised Jean de Meun.

When William of Aragon, as has already been noted, begins his prologue with a paraphrase of Aristotle on the desire of all things for the good, he indicates his interest in a key element of Boethius's thought. In Books II and III especially of the *Consolation*, and in the treatise known as *Quomodo substantiae*, the third of his *opuscula sacra*, Boethius articulates his understanding of the good.[23] As Siobhan Nash-Marshall argues in her detailed investigation of this aspect of his thought, Boethius inherited two philosophical definitions of the good that did not sit entirely comfortably together. One is 'ontological' (all things are good in as much as they have being), and the other is 'teleological' (all things desire the good; the good is their final cause).[24] In the *Quomodo sub-*

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[22] The *Consolation* 'is to be seen as a work that does not accomplish what it sets out to do, that it does so intentionally, and that its larger goal is to demonstrate the limits of philosophy as understood, or misunderstood, by an author who refuses to accept its transcendent nature': Relihan, *The Prisoner's Philosophy*, p. 13. Relihan is developing ideas first explored in his *Ancient Menippean Satire*, pp. 187–97.

[23] The *Quomodo substantiae* is discussed in Chadwick, *Boethius*, pp. 203–11, and Marenbon, *Boethius*, pp. 87–94. See also the detailed discussion throughout Nash-Marshall, *Participation and the Good*.

[24] For a discussion of these two definitions of the good, see Nash-Marshall, *Participation and the Good*, pp. 41–68. Nash-Marshall points out that both definitions 'could be either Platonic or Aristotelian in origin, for both philosophers claim both things, to one degree or another' (p. 32, n. 1). See also Chadwick, *Boethius*, pp. 203–11, who emphasizes the importance of Proclus for this aspect of Boethius's thought. Aristotle discusses the good as a cause of motion in *Movement of Animals*, 6, 700b25–701a5; see also the discussion of the good in *Nichomachean Ethics*, I. 6–7, 1096a11–1098a18.

*stantiae*, Boethius brings these two ways of understanding the good into con-
tact. If things desire the good, and also desire that which is similar to them,[25]
then things which are must be good:

> Ea quae sunt bona sunt; tenet enim communis sententia doctorum omne quod est
> ad bonum tendere, omne autem tendit ad simile. Quae igitur ad bonum tendunt
> bona ipsa sunt.

> [Things which are, are good. For the common opinion of the learned holds that
> everything that is tends to good and everything tends to its like. Therefore things
> which tend to good are themselves good.][26]

But while he accepts that things are good in as much as they have being,
Boethius makes an important qualification. He attempts to show that the
goodness of things is not essential: things gain their goodness through partici-
pation. Being is derived from God, the first good, and thus it is from God that
being gains its goodness.[27] He recognizes that a less sophisticated identification
of being with goodness and goodness with God runs the risk of something
like pantheism: 'Ex quo fit ut omnia quae sunt deus sint, quod dictu nefas est'
('Hence all things that are, are God — an impious assertion'; *Quomodo sub-
stantiae*, ll. 79–80, p. 45). In the *Consolation*, these ideas recur in a different
form. In Book II, Philosophy demonstrates to the narrator that goods such
as wealth, office, power, and glory are incomplete and thus false. In Book III
this develops into a wider disquisition on the nature of the good.[28] Philosophy
presents the view that the desire for the good is the natural state of all creation,
including man:

> Est enim mentibus hominum veri boni naturaliter inserta cupiditas, sed ad falsa
> devius error abducit.

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[25] Chadwick (*Boethius*, p. 209) notes that this presupposition is common in Proclus.

[26] Boethius, *Quomodo substantiae*, in *The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of
Philosophy*, ed. and trans. by Stewart, Rand, and Tester, p. 43, ll. 56–60. All quotations and
translations of both the *Consolation* and the *opuscula sacra* are from this edition. I have also
consulted the edition of Moreschini; in the passages I quote in this essay there are no substan-
tive textual differences, so I present the text as found in Stewart, Rand, and Tester throughout.

[27] As John Marenbon points out in his contribution to this volume, this calls for a counter-
factual 'thought experiment' in which God is imagined, briefly, not to exist, although Marenbon
questions the usefulness of the term 'thought experiment' in this context. See Marenbon in this
volume, pp. 24–25.

[28] For an insightful commentary on Books II–IV, see Magee, 'The Good and Morality'.

[The desire for the true good is naturally inborn in the minds of men, but they are led astray after false goods.] (iii, pr. 2, ll. 13–15; p. 233)

Returning to the partial goods described in Book ii, Philosophy scrutinizes them in more detail; they may not be the true good, yet the human desire for them constitutes a partial manifestation of the inborn desire for the good.[29] In a series of metaphors that we will encounter again in the *Rose*, Philosophy describes how the *leges* ('laws', iii, m. 2, 3) of Nature bind and order the cosmos: the tamed lion will return to its natural state when it first tastes blood, the bent sapling will spring upwards when released, and the caged bird will return to the wild at the first opportunity (iii, m. 2, 7–30). Articulating the idea that William of Aragon picks up on in his prologue, and following the pattern of the argument in the *Quomodo substantiae*, Philosophy identifies being itself as good, and the desire to continue in being (something observable in all of nature) is taken as further proof that all things desire what is good. For animals, reproduction is the means by which this continuation in being is achieved, and Philosophy illustrates this with a memorable image that builds on the rhetorical heights of the cosmological song of iii, m. 9 (a metrum heavily indebted to Plato's *Timaeus*):

> Iam vero quanta est naturae diligentia, ut cuncta semine multiplicato propagentur! Quae omnia non modo ad tempus manendi verum generatim quoque quasi in perpetuum permanendi veluti quasdam machinas esse quis nesciat?

> [Again, how great indeed is nature's care that all are propagated by the multiplication of seed! Who does not know that they are all as it were a kind of mechanism not only for enduring for a time, but also from one generation to another as if to last for ever?] (iii, pr. 11, ll. 69–73; p. 293)

Mankind also participates in nature, and likewise demonstrates its desire for the good through its impulse to continue in being via reproduction — mankind as well, then, is a kind of 'generation machine'. Only the intervention of the will can interrupt the forces of nature that compel man to perpetuate himself. But as Philosophy attempts to present the animal sexual urge to reproduce as an expression of a universal desire for goodness, her argument seems to raise some difficulties:

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[29] 'sufficientiae, potentiae, claritudinis, reverentiae, iucunditatis *nomina* quidem esse diversa, nullo modo vero discrepare *substantium*' ('the *names* of sufficiency, power, fame, respect and pleasure are different, but their *substance* differs in no respect'; iii, pr. 9, ll. 42–44; p. 267, emphasis original).

nam ne in animalibus quidem mandendi amor ex animae voluntatibus, verum ex naturae principiis venit. Nam saepe mortem cogentibus causis quam natura reformidat voluntas amplectitur, contraque illud quo solo mortalium rerum durat diuturnitas gignendi opus, quod natura semper appetit, interdium coercet voluntas. Adeo haec sui caritas non ex animal motione sed ex naturali intentione procedit.

[For not even in living things does the love of survival proceed from the acts of will of the soul, but from natural principles. For often for compelling reasons the will embraces death, which nature fears and avoids, and on the other hand, though nature always desires it, the will sometimes restrains that act of generation by which alone the perpetuation of mortal things is assured. So this love of self proceeds not from a motion of the soul but from a natural intention.] (III pr. 11, ll. 89–97; pp. 294–95, translation modified)

Philosophy thus argues that the natural tendency of things towards the good can be witnessed in all animals, including man, in their desire for self-preservation and reproduction.[30] But this 'natural intention' (*intentio naturalis*) can be overridden by an act of will (*voluntas*): an individual can choose death or can choose not to reproduce sexually. These lines carry an implication that seems problematic: if a God-given 'natural intention' compels man to reproduce, then man, presumably, errs by refusing to do so, exercising his will in order to deviate from his inborn desire for what is good (that is, the continuation of the species). When Jean comes to translate this passage in his *Livres de confort*, writing in a period during which the role of the human will was the focus of much philosophical debate, he supplies a number of alternative translations for Boethius's 'coercet' that seem to intensify the force of these lines: it is the will ('volenté') that 'hait ou destourbe et refrene ce que nature desire et requiert touz jours, c'est assavoir l'euvre de generacion' ('hates or disturbs and holds back that which nature always desires and requires, that is the work of generation'; III, pr. 11, ll. 88–90).[31] This desire comes not from the motion of the individual soul, but, in Jean's French, the 'entencion de nature' (III, pr. 11, l. 93).

In my final comments on Boethius before turning back to Jean de Meun, I want to suggest that the *Consolation* raises a potentially troubling question about how human sexual desire fits into a universe in which the impulse to reproduce is inherently good. It is perhaps perverse to focus on a glancing detail that emerges from the margins of Philosophy's argument, and perhaps even more perverse to insist that there must be something inherently problematic in

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[30] See White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness in a Medieval Literary Tradition*, pp. 73–74.

[31] For voluntarism in the thirteenth century, see Kent, *Virtues of the Will*, pp. 94–149.

a positive view of human sexual activity. It can be argued, indeed, that Boethius does not see sexual desire as a particularly problematic issue. As John Magee's analysis makes clear, it is only in Book III that 'pleasure' is added to the list of the false goods detailed in Book II,[32] and although Philosophy does dismiss the apparent good of these pleasures of the body (*voluptates corporis*, III, pr. 7, l. 1), it is far from clear that sexual pleasure is the most prominent of these.[33] Philosophy says that the pleasures of the body cause suffering, but this suffering seems to be physical illness — perhaps venereal disease, perhaps gout, depending on whether the sexual or the alimentary pleasures are the target here: 'Quantos illae morbos, quam intolerabiles dolores quasi quendam fructum nequitiae frutentium solent referre corporibus!' ('What dreadful diseases, what unbearable pains they generally cause in the bodies of those enjoying them, as a kind of fruit of their wickedness!'; III, pr. 7, ll. 3–5; p. 257). For Philosophy, the worst side-effect of the joy of a wife and children ('coniugis [...] liberorumque iucunditas', III, pr. 7, ll. 12–13) is the great worry one has about one's offspring, and at the end of Book II she likens the bonds of holy marriage to the divine bonds that unite the warring elements of the cosmos (II, m. 7, ll. 24–25). By no means can Boethius be seen as a Pelagian: in his most direct statement of church orthodoxy, the *De fide catholica* (another of the *opuscula sacra*), he is clear that sin, death, and the corruption of the body are the results of the Fall.[34] Yet sexuality never seemed to present itself as a painful and unanswerable problem for Boethius in the way it did for Augustine.[35] Nevertheless, for a medieval reader who was deeply preoccupied with human sexuality, passages of the *Consolation* could certainly raise questions about the nature of human sexual desire. One such moment is the concluding metrum to Book III.

[32] Magee, 'The Good and Morality', p. 187.

[33] Boethius may be reflecting an Aristotelian understanding of the vice of excess (*akolasia*), which was the excessive indulgence of any bodily pleasure (*Nicomachean Ethics*, III. 10, 1117b22–37). In the Middle Ages this was usually translated as *intemperantia*, whereupon it lost some of its Aristotelian broad applicability to become increasingly assimilated to the old Gregorian vice of *luxuria* (lust); see Kent, 'On the Track of Lust', pp. 356–60, from which this account of intemperance is derived.

[34] See *De fide catholica*, ll. 98–138 and 234–43, in The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy, ed. and trans. by Stweart, Rand, and Tester, pp. 52–71. Henry Chadwick, *Boethius*, p. 176, characterizes this treatise as 'a statement of what is to be believed on authority in contrast to what may be understood and elucidated by reason'.

[35] Augustine articulates his opposition to the positive attitude to human sexual desire espoused by the Pelagians in his polemic against Julian of Eclanum; see Clark, 'Generation, Degeneration, Regeneration'; see also *City of God*, XIV. 24.

In this song, Philosophy tells the story of how Orpheus descended into hell to recover Eurydice, and how, in breaking the prohibition against looking back to her before reaching earth, he lost her forever. Just as Orpheus lost Eurydice by looking back as he ascended from hell, Philosophy explains, the mind that is ascending towards higher goods should avoid returning to earthly preoccupations (III, m. 12, ll. 52–58).[36] But before giving this gloss, Philosophy seems to imply that there is something almost inevitable about Orpheus's failure to abide by the prohibition against his backward glance:

> Quis legem det amantibus?
> Maior lex amor est sibi.
>
> [Who can give lovers laws?
> Love is a greater law unto itself.] (III, m. 12, 47–48; p. 311)

At other points in Book III, the divinely instituted laws of Nature (III, m. 2, l. 3) or of God (III, m. 9, l. 20) are said to bind creation together. Here, in the Orpheus metrum, it is the *lex* of love that overruns the restrictions placed upon it. In referring first to the *lex* instituted to prohibit Orpheus's desire to see Eurydice (III, m. 12, l. 44) and then to the *lex* of love that demands such desire, Boethius seems to evoke a paradox. How can nature be governed by beneficent *leges* if the individual human subject experiences the natural impulse or *lex* of desire as a dangerously powerful and ultimately destructive force? Philosophy presents her version of the Orpheus story as an allegory for how the prisoner should not turn his mind downwards to sensible things. The literal surface of the narrative cannot, however, be wholly discarded, and the difficulties raised by this presentation of the overwhelming power of desire as a superordinate 'law' are not easily banished. Orpheus's backward glance is similar to Philosophy's injunction, immediately after this metrum, for Boethius to ascend to heaven and look back on the earth in contempt (IV, m. 1, ll. 3–4). Of course such an injunction raises a contrast between these two kinds of looking — but the very similarity of the motions emphasizes the gulf which separates Orpheus's earthbound desires from the heights to which Philosophy hopes to escort the narrator. The myth of Orpheus, indeed, is a particularly problematic story to evoke in this context. Boethius's version of the Orpheus myth differs markedly, by

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[36] Note that medieval commentators produced a range of interpretations of this metrum, not always following Boethius's own indication in any straightforward way. For a selection of views, see Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, p. 106 n. 97; Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, pp. 86–145; Chance Nitzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity*, pp. 46–47.

omission, from one particularly widely disseminated text with which Boethius was surely familiar: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[37] In Ovid's version, Orpheus, in grief after having lost Eurydice as he returned from the underworld, foregoes sexual contact with the opposite sex in favour of boys (*Metamorphoses*, x. 78–85) and as a result is torn limb from limb by the enraged Ciconian women whose advances he has spurned. In the terms put forward by Boethius in Prose 11 of Book III, the Ovidian Orpheus is an excellent example of a human who exercises his will to 'restrain' — through homosexuality — 'that act of generation by which alone the perpetuation of mortal things is assured'. Orpheus, then, is a figure for misdirected desire in more ways than one; but again Philosophy's suggestion that there is something inevitable in his failure to abide by the prohibitions placed upon his desire casts a shadow over her insistence that the universal desire for the good inheres in the sexual impulse.

The natural desire for the good posited by Boethius includes the instinctive human desire to reproduce, and it is precisely this question of human sexuality that generates some of the underlying tensions and interpretative difficulties in Book III of the *Consolation*. But, as I read them, these problems are cross-currents in the wider flow of Boethius's thought, and despite the vast difficulties of the task, Boethius wishes at last to insist upon the goodness of being, and thus the goodness of nature (including human nature). If William of Aragon's prologue to his *Consolation* commentary raises the possibility of a radical human self-division with his reference to the 'man divided in two', the suggestion is fleeting: he follows Boethius in drawing from Aristotelian teleology ('all things desire the good') the conclusion that being is inherently good. Jean de Meun, in closely translating William of Aragon's prologue and then the entirety of the *Consolation* itself, faithfully reproduces the positions of William and Boethius. But in his own poem, the *Romance of the Rose*, Jean presents a much darker vision of humanity, in which spiritual desires and bodily impulses are presented as imbricated, perhaps even hopelessly enmeshed.[38] In extending and attempt-

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[37] Seth Lerer comments on Boethius's dependence on Seneca for his version of the Orpheus myth, *Boethius and Dialogue*, pp. 160–65; see also pp. 237–53. In comparing Ovid's and Boethius's accounts of Orpheus, I note that *Metamorphoses*, x. 40–48 and *Consolation*, III, m. 12, ll. 34–43 are strikingly similar — perhaps similar enough to suggest imitation. Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius*, p. 318, cites the *Metamorphoses* along with Virgil and Seneca as parallels for these lines. For a wider discussion of medieval uses of the Orpheus myth, see Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, which treats Boethius at pp. 91–96.

[38] Compare Marco Nievergelt's examination of Guillaume de Deguileville's (failed) attempt to firmly separate the body and the soul in his contribution to this volume.

ing to conclude the allegory of suspended and unfulfilled desire begun by his authorial predecessor Guillaume de Lorris, Jean drew on a bewilderingly plural range of sources to explore the many different perspectives from which desire can be understood.[39] Borrowing from Alain de Lille's *Complaint of Nature*, Jean uses an allegorical scene to present an echo of the notion that the natural desire for reproduction is divinely instituted; but although Jean's proximate source is Alain de Lille and a specifically twelfth-century tradition, the germ of this idea, I have tried to show, was already present in Boethius's *Consolation*.[40] Jean depicts the personification of Nature, the self-proclaimed 'connetable' and 'vic-aire' of God (l. 16752), labouring at her forge 'por continuer les espieces' (to continue the species, l. 15868), creating individuals after the model of their forms, much like Philosophy's image of life perpetuating itself like a 'genera-tion machine' in Book III of the *Consolation*. But in an outrageous extension of this idea of the divinity of natural procreation, Nature's priest Genius claims that the way to reach the 'Park of the Lamb' (which is, at least in part, a figure for the Christian paradise) is through the 'labour' of enthusiastic copulation: 'Penez de Nature honorer, | servez la par bien laborer' (set your mind to hon-ouring Nature, serve her by working well, ll. 20607–08).[41] It is possible to see in Jean's *Rose* a riotously comic development of the contradiction that is implied by Book III of the *Consolation*: human desire is by nature good, but it can also be, as it was for Orpheus, something dangerous, uncontrollable, and fragment-ing, not easily reconcilable with an idea of 'the good'.

This tension can be sensed in many different parts of the *Rose*, above all per-haps in the Boethian figure of Reason.[42] For although Reason spends much of her dialogue with the Lover attempting to pull him away from the path of dis-ordered lust, more than once she presents the human impulse to reproduce in neutral or positive terms, although she is consistently suspicious of sexual activ-ity that has as its aim pleasure rather than procreation. Just as in Book III of the *Consolation*, procreative sex is praised because it allows mankind to maintain its 'divine being':

[39] Huot, *Dreams of Lovers and Lies of Poets* demonstrates the importance of Jean's dense and complex allusions to his poetic practice.

[40] For Jean's use of the *De planctu Naturae*, see Wetherbee, 'The Literal and the Allegorical'; Quilligan, 'Words and Sex'; Morton, 'Queer Metaphors and Queerer Reproduction'.

[41] Cf. Zeeman, 'Philosophy in Parts', pp. 221–22.

[42] For Reason's Boethian features, see Cherniss, 'Jean de Meun's Reson and Boethius'.

> Mes je sai bien, pas nou devin,
> continuer l'estre devin
> a son paoir voloir deüst
> quiconques a fame geüst,
> et soi garder an son senblable,
> pour ce qu'il sunt tuit corrunpale,
> si que ja par succession
> ne fausist generation. (ll. 4373–80)

[But I know well, it is no divination, that whoever lies with a woman should desire as far as he is able to continue the divine being, and to maintain himself in that which is similar to him, because they are all corruptible, so that generation by succession never fails.]

That Reason's discourse is influenced by Boethius's discussion of the ontological nature of the good is made clear later in her speech, when she closely imitates the final prosa of Book III of the *Consolation* to argue, like Augustine, that one consequence of the goodness of being is the non-existence of evil: 'mal est noianz' (evil is nothing, l. 6268), she says, clearly rendering Philosophy's 'Malum igitur […] nihil est' (III, pr. 12, ll. 80–81).[43] But it is in discussions of reproduction that this aspect of Boethius's thought is particularly stressed; it recurs when Reason describes what she calls 'amor naturel':

> c'est naturiex enclinemenz
> de volair farder son semblable
> par entencion convenable,
> soit par voie d'engendreure,
> ou par cure de norreture.
> A ceste amor sunt prez et prestes
> ausinc li home com les bestes. (ll. 5740–46)

[it is a natural inclination to wish to preserve what is similar to one, by an appropriate intention, be it by the route of procreation, or by the care of nurture. Males and females are disposed to this love, men as much as beasts.]

There is something problematic in Reason's attempt to draw the Lover away from a sexual desire that is interested only in sensual delight rather than reproduction even as she states that this instinct to pursue sexual pleasure is fundamental to human nature. Matters are complicated further by the fact that not everyone experiences this desire to reproduce. The only people who are not subject to the pains of love, she said earlier, are

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[43] Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, VII. 12.

> cil de male vie
> que Genius esconmenie
> pour ce qu'il font tort a Nature. (ll. 4313–15)

[those leading evil lives, whom Genius excommunicates because they commit wrongs against Nature.]

Reason is referring here to the sodomites who will be excoriated by Genius towards the end of the poem. For these individuals who refuse to use their God-given genitals for reproduction (and who are associated with the sexual deviance of Ovid's version of the Orpheus myth, ll. 19621–24), Genius pronounces the oddly self-defeating penalty of castration (ll. 19641–42). But bearing in mind the Boethian subtext that informs so much of Jean's thought, where deviation from the *intentio naturalis* is shown to be a conscious act of the will, Reason's call for the Lover to overturn his natural desires comes uncomfortably close to encouraging him to work 'against nature': an activity that might be understood to include, at one extreme, sodomy. If this seems like a perverse reading of what Reason is saying here, the hint that the conscious obstruction of the sexual drive has something in common with sodomy also crops up in the sermon of Genius. Nature's priest prefaces his attack on the sodomites by inveighing against virgins, and both groups are told that they should feel 'grant honte' (ll. 19531, 19652, great shame). The implication — and it remains only an implication — is that virginity and sodomy are both 'against nature' in their opposition to the natural desire to reproduce.

A final resonance between Boethius and the *Rose* that I would like to look at here occurs in the speech of La Vieille (The Old Woman), a lascivious figure and in many ways a parodic version of Boethius's Philosophy.[44] La Vieille relates advice for seduction to the imprisoned Bel Acueil or 'Fair Welcome', drawn largely from the third book of Ovid's *Ars amatoria*.[45] Earlier I mentioned that in Boethius's *Consolation* Philosophy draws upon a series of metaphors to show how nature will always overcome artifice to return to its original state: the tamed lion will kill when it tastes blood, the sapling bent to the ground will spring upright, and the caged bird will return to the wild when released (III, m. 2, ll. 7–30). In the same way, Philosophy says, humans have an inherent and natural desire for the good. In the *Rose*, La Vieille explains that freedom from

[44] For a discussion of the Boethian elements of La Vielle, see Morton, *The 'Roman de la rose' in its Philosophical Context*, pp. 65–68.

[45] For more on Jean's use of Ovid, see Langlois, *Origines et sources du 'Roman de la Rose'*, pp. 119–27; Bouché, 'Ovide et Jean de Meun'.

restriction is something that all living things naturally desire, a truth she illustrates by closely imitating Boethius's description of the caged bird that desires to return to the wild:

> Li oisillons du vert bochage,
> quant il est pris et mis en cage,
> [...]
> si desierre il les bois ramez
> qu'il a naturelement amez. (ll. 13911–18)

[The little bird of the green bush, when it is taken and put in a cage [...] so desires the dense wood that it naturally loved.][46]

By the same token, women desire to be free of the restrictions of marriage, which limit them to a single sexual partner:

> Ausinc sachiez que toutes fames,
> saient damoiseles ou dames,
> de quelconques procession,
> ont naturele entencion
> qu'el cerchoient volentiers
> par quex chemins, par quex sentiers
> a franchise venir porroient,
> car torjorz avoir la vorroient. (ll. 13929–36)

[Likewise, I assure you, all women, be they young girls or ladies, of whatever origin, have a natural intention to willingly seek, by whatever paths, how they might come to freedom, for they always wish to have it.]

With La Vieille's reference to 'naturele entencion', Jean is clearly evoking the *intentio naturalis* discussed by Philosophy in Book iii of the *Consolation*: the impulse that drives the species to persist in being through reproduction. Here, however, this 'natural intention' is presented not merely as a desire to reproduce and thus perpetuate the species, but as a woman's desire to take many sexual partners. How can the divine, natural force later personified by the figure of Nature also accommodate La Vieille's clearly problematic advice to Bel Acueil — that marriage is a kind of prison, that women should embrace the many sexual partners towards which their 'naturele entencion' directs them?

One way of understanding the presentation of sexuality in Jean's endlessly complex poem is as a radical extension of the notion that desire is inherently good in as much as it participates in the natural tendency of all creation for

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[46] Cf. Boethius, *De consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. by Moreschini, iii, m. 2, ll. 17–25.

self-perpetuation. But for the individual subject who experiences this desire, this natural impulse can be a source of fragmentation and disorder, and as can be seen in the sexual libertinism of La Vieille, it can lead to morally problematic positions that expressly contradict Church doctrine.[47] From this perspective, and in the terms that I outlined in the introduction to this essay, the *Rose* can be seen as a kind of poetic thought experiment that follows through Boethius's philosophical notion of the inherent goodness of being to its *ad absurdum* conclusion. Jean does not seem interested in overturning Boethius's arguments. Rather, he seems to wish to inhabit the contradiction, to explore the vastly plural ways in which desire can be experienced and understood, without coming to a final conclusion about how it fits into an understanding of the nature of the cosmos. In her fascinating study of the *Rose*, Sylvia Huot sees Jean's poem as building on Boethius to draw together a plurality of perspectives on what love might be: 'Whether it is the Ovidian *ratio* of carefully controlled seduction, the doctrine of Christian charity, or Nature's imperative to procreate [...] the animal sex drive is crafted by the human intellect into a wide range of erotic discourses and performances'.[48] If, in his *Rose*, Jean was amplifying a tension already present in the *Consolation*, he goes, I feel, much further. What is merely problematic in Boethius becomes, in Jean's poem, something radically plural and self-contradictory.

In the prologue to his translation of the *Consolation*, Jean carries across William of Aragon's fleeting suggestion that the contrary drives of man might bespeak a fundamental division: 'homme [est] devisé en deuz'. The suggestion, however, remains nothing more than that. But in the *Rose*, Jean comes much closer to expressing something like this radical split, as he explores the disorderly, fragmenting processes of desire. As the continuator of Guillaume de Lorris's poem, Jean inherited a work already preoccupied with desire and self-division. In a memorable scene that clearly fascinated Jean, Guillaume's Lover stumbles across a fountain which bears an inscription claiming that it is the fountain of Narcissus: the very place where Narcissus, having disdained Echo the nymph until she died of grief, fell in love with his own reflection and gazed at it until he perished (ll. 1433–1520). Despite this warning, and although he recognizes it as a 'perilous mirror' (l. 1569), the Lover approaches the fountain. Looking into it, he does not see himself as Narcissus did; instead, he sees

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[47] Joan Cadden examines the problematic distinction between 'universal' and 'individual' nature in Aristotle and his medieval commentators in *Nothing Natural Is Shameful*, p. 148; see also Zeeman, 'Philosophy in Parts', p. 221 n. 26.

[48] Huot, *Dreams of Lovers and Lies of Poets*, p. 57.

a vision of the garden in which he is standing. Gazing further into this mirror, Guillaume's Lover glimpses the rosebud with which he falls madly in love (ll. 1613–20), propelling the action of the rest of his poem and, in a more circuitous way, that of Jean's continuation. In Giorgio Agamben's remarkable reading, Guillaume's account of Amant falling in love with an optical image implies that the Lover desires a 'mental phantasm', something that is produced by the mind, and something that cannot at last be possessed.[49] But Guillaume's 'perilous mirror' also suggests that desire produces division, an internal fracture and a loss of self-recognition. Jean responds to Guillaume's account of the mirror of Narcissus in a number of ways,[50] but one telling instance of such a response occurs in the dialogue between Reason and the Lover that I have already looked at in some detail. In place of irrational, consuming sexual desire, Reason suggests that the Lover turn his desires towards her. She does not want the Lover to be 'sanz amie' (without a lover), and she proposes herself as an ideal match (l. 5768). Repeating an idea that first appeared in Guillaume's text, that Reason was formed in the image of God (ll. 2974–75), she exhorts the Lover to engage in self-contemplation — to observe himself in her face:

> Regarde ci quele forme a
> et te mire en mon cler visage. (ll. 5788–89)

If Reason's request that the Lover contemplate himself in the mirror of her face resonates with the myth of Narcissus, these resonances become stronger as Reason goes on to compare her position explicitly to that of Echo:

> Trop sunt dolentes et confuses
> puceles qui sunt refusees,
> quant de prier ne sunt usees,
> si con tu meïsmes le prueves
> par Echo, sanz querre autres prueves. (ll. 5804–08)

[Maidens who are refused get very sad and upset when they are not used, as you yourself prove by Echo, without looking for other proofs.]

Reason offers rational self-contemplation as an alternative to the overpowering desire that the Lover is experiencing, even as she accepts some forms of sexual

[49] Agamben, *Stanzas*, pp. 73–89. See also Poirion, 'Narcisse et Pymalion', pp. 161–62.

[50] The story of Pygmalion, which appears towards the end of Jean's text, expressly invites comparison with the myth of Narcissus (ll. 20846–48); see Poirion, 'Narcisse et Pymalion'. But Jean also seems to 'answer' Guillaume's story of Narcissus with the tale of Venus and Adonis (ll. 15629–734); see Brownlee, 'Orpheus's Song Re-Sung', pp. 201–02.

desire as natural, innate, and blameless. But in asking the Lover to take her as an 'amie', Reason seems herself to have become as it were contaminated by the sexual impulses that exist innately in nature: her demand that the Lover contemplate his rational soul coexists with a demand that he look upon her as a female object of desire. And although this desire is only figurative (to desire the personification of reason is to desire the intelligible goods accessible through rational thought), Reason's explicit reference to the Narcissus myth emphasizes how far this scene remains charged by an understanding of sexual desire as potentially dangerous, perhaps lethal. And finally, by addressing Jean de Meun's lover-narrator as if he himself had recounted the story of Narcissus that had occurred earlier in the text, in *Guillaume's* section ('as *you yourself* prove'), Reason shows how the apparent unity of a single, continuous narrative voice in the *Rose* is a fiction that masks an inherent duality: its two authors, Guillaume and Jean. Both psychologically and textually, the Lover is shown to be 'devisé en deuz', and we are forced to question how long the idea of a unified, inherently good subject can survive in the *Rose*, when the self is seen to be made up of so many conflicting, centrifugal forces.

In producing *Li Livres de confort*, Jean de Meun seems to have made no use of William of Aragon's commentary on the *Consolation*, and yet he chose to preface his translation with a version of William's prologue. It has been suggested that Jean simply hoped to appear more 'up-to-date' in selecting a newer source, and perhaps this is true.[51] But there may be other ways of explaining Jean's selection. By focusing precisely on the goodness of being, and the natural tendency of all things to pursue the good, William of Aragon identifies a powerful strand in Boethius's thought that seems to have particularly preoccupied Jean de Meun. In the *Rose*, the paradoxical nature of this notion is explored and played with at length: desire is shown to be fragmenting, irrational, and destructive, even as many figures in the *Rose* insist, like Boethius's Philosophy, that it belongs to a God-given human nature. The fleeting reference in William of Aragon's prologue to the 'man divided in two' hints at the availability of a more pessimistic view: a fallen man whose contrary impulses bespeak a split that cannot be mended. But neither William nor Jean, as he translates him in his prologue, carries this notion through: as in Boethius, the emphasis lies, at last, on the unified human subject and its inherent inclination towards what is good. The *Rose*, of course, is a text that is generically very different to the dutiful, almost scholarly translation of the *Consolation* that Jean produced in

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[51] Minnis, 'Aspects of the Medieval French and English Traditions', pp. 322–24.

the *Livres de confort*, and as such it demonstrates the extent to which the ratiocinative and imaginative modes can produce different effects. Frank Kermode seems to have had a distinction like this in mind when he suggested that 'one of the differences between doing philosophy and writing poetry is that in the former activity you defeat your object if you imitate the confusion inherent in an unsystematic view of your subject, whereas in the second you must in some measure imitate what is extreme and scattering bright, or else lose touch with that feeling of bright confusion'.[52]

How, then, should the *Rose* be read alongside Jean's translation of the *Consolation*? It may be that the *Rose* reveals the innate tendency of poetic writing to emphasize the more disordered aspects of human experience, and the self-division of the human subject.[53] But I feel that it might also reveal something about Jean de Meun's own temperament, his fascination with the very notion of opposition, paradox, and incommensurability. David Hult has suggested that the seriousness and straightforwardness with which Jean approached his project as a translator after producing the radically indeterminate *Rose* might represent a kind of 'retraction', a turning towards more serious, devout literary activities.[54] I am sympathetic to this view — certainly it seems misguided to attempt to question the sincerity of Jean's project as translator of Boethius. But in producing a prose translation, it might also be that Jean was simply operating in a realm governed by different rules. It was in writing the *Rose*, a work that occupied some ill-defined territory between the elevated tradition of classical poetry and the transient pleasures of vernacular 'making', that Jean felt able to trespass upon the territory of philosophical demonstration, to explore, perhaps even to mock, the far-reaching consequences of Boethius's idea of the natural desire for the good.[55] In the fiction of the *Rose*, Jean could test limits: a thought

[52] Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, pp. 80–81.

[53] For readings of the *Rose* that take into account a view of human sexuality as essentially fallen, see Dahlberg, 'Love and the *Romance of the Rose*' and Hill, 'Narcissus, Pygmalion, and the Castration of Saturn', especially p. 420. Both of these articles develop ideas first put forward in Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 195–207, and the general argument of Fleming, *The 'Roman de la Rose'* and Fleming, *Reason and the Lover*. For other explorations of the Fall in the *Rose*, see Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, pp. 69–100; Cherniss, 'Jean de Meun's Reson and Boethius', pp. 684–85.

[54] Hult, 'Poetry and the Translation of Knowledge in Jean de Meun', p. 40.

[55] For Jean's self-conscious interaction with elevated Latin poetry, see Uitti, 'From *Clerc* to *Poète*'. For 'making' and its subordination to the more elevated literary categories, see the still-classic Olson, 'Making and Poetry in the Age of Chaucer'.

experiment designed for play rather than proof, an exploration of the paradoxes of the intellectual tradition he received, and their interaction with the individual experience of desire.[56]

[56] See Zeeman, 'Philosophy in Parts', p. 233: 'what I have argued in this essay is that in some cases a literary refusal of the language of analysis, logic, or precept can become a larger, anti-systematizing, even anti-metaphysical, gesture, part of whose critical impact derives from its obliquity and its evasiveness. Could we go so far as to say that such an extreme sceptical gesture could, in the later Middle Ages, *only be made* from within literary discourse?'

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# Interpretation all the Way Down: Fabliaux and Medieval Exegesis

## Gabrielle Lyons

Fabliaux as a genre are easy to recognize though hard to define. They are short, comic, French texts produced from roughly 1160 to 1340, often obscene, typically featuring tricks, and never unambiguously moral in tone, though many feature moralizing statements. Many of these frivolous, tongue-in-cheek texts seem to show at least a passing acquaintance with medieval higher education; investigations of links between the fabliaux and particular intellectual theories and factions have yielded illuminating readings.[1] However, my intent here, rather than establishing any specific academic or doctrinal allegiance for the texts or their authors, is to examine ways that the fabliaux might reflect a more general acquaintance with the university curriculum, what we might call a lowest common denominator of exegetical training, and perhaps a frustrated or playful curiosity about the unexplored implications of that curriculum. My suggestion is not only that an awareness of exegetical theory can shed light on the fabliaux, but also that the superficially trivial and scurrilous texts offer a context where ideas about interpretation, meaning, and truth can be explored and tested in ways unavailable in more religious or scholastic settings. The low-status, low-stakes context of the fabliaux could be seen

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[1] For example, Pearcy, *Logic and Humour in the Fabliaux* and Pearcy, '*Sentence* and *Solas* in the Old French Fabliaux', for links between fabliaux and specific schools of thought, or Corbellari, *La Voix des Clercs*, especially for Rutebeuf and Henri de Valenciennes, both discussed below.

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as a laboratory for hermeneutic thought experiments, somewhere to play out the consequences of applying scholastic exegetical techniques without the constraining principles that guide and restrict their use on sacred texts.

Fabliaux frequently hinge on interpretation. They present a world where the important thing is not what you do but how it is described and understood. In texts like *La Damoisele qui ne pooit oïr parler de foutre* and *L'Esquiriel*, for instance, the sinful nature of extramarital sex is apparently accepted without question, but the terms by which the act is designated change everything. If the thing in the man's *braies* is not sinful flesh but a thirsty horse or a hungry squirrel, then the damsel is under a moral obligation to let it drink at her fountain or dig up her nuts. A sin by any other name, according to many fabliaux, may not be a sin at all. I have argued elsewhere that the fabliaux consistently side with characters who show superior linguistic awareness.[2] The plots reward those who can move nimbly between levels of meaning, never getting stuck with one that doesn't suit them. This immediately suggests parallels with certain aspects of medieval approaches to hermeneutics.

I'll begin by exploring medieval exegesis and possible concerns about interpretation, then consider three fabliaux: *Brunain, la vache au prestre* by Jean Bodel, the *Lai d'Aristote* by Henri de Valenciennes, and Rutebeuf's *Frere Denise*.[3] As previously explained, my intent is not to assign the fabliaux to a particular side in medieval debates but to consider them as experimenting with potentially problematic aspects of interpretation less easily explored in the context of biblical exegesis. The account of medieval exegesis that follows therefore overlooks subtleties and distinctions between schools of thought in search of a lowest common denominator of exegetical training that might be found in the texts or their authors.

At the core of medieval exegesis is the idea of unchanging truth conveyed through a fixed text, scripture, with varying methods and degrees of interpretation needed in order to reveal it.[4] For medieval scholars, interpretation is unavoidable because scriptural text, the ultimate source of knowledge and truth, contains much that seems contradictory (of Church teaching or of other parts of scripture) or irrelevant. Because truth must be extracted from words, there has to be acknowledgement that words are signs. And, as Richard of St Victor

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[2] Lyons, '"Avoir" and "Savoir"', pp. 121–58.

[3] The author of *Aristote* is now thought to be Henri de Valenciennes (rather than Henri d'Andeli): see Zufferey, 'Un problème de paternité'.

[4] See de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, especially I, 75–82.

and many others taught, 'Not only words, but things also are representational'.[5] Thus, for medieval exegetes and their audience, anything and everything is potential material for interpretation. Scripture, it was often said, contains multiple teachings but only a single truth:

> Sententia divina numquam absurda, numquam falsa esse potest, sed [...] multa inveniantur contraria, sententia nullam admittit repugnantiam, semper congrua est, semper vera.

> [The divine deeper meaning can never be absurd, never false. Although [...] many contradictory things are found, the deeper meaning admits no conflict, is always harmonious, always true.][6]

Admittedly, that single truth is often said to be infinite in its complexity, but to modern eyes there is something paradoxical in the medieval exegete's enthusiasm for ever more elaborate and tendentious figurations of a meaning already known to both exegete and auditors. The exegetes' answer is to welcome multiplicity of interpretation as a resource that deepens understanding: Augustine says, 'Obscurius positum est, ut multos intellectus generet, et ditiores discedant homines' ('It is put down obscurely so that it might generate many meanings and men might come away richer').[7] This does not prevent him rejecting some apparently straightforward meanings in favour of others that accord better with his understanding of the truth of scripture as charity.[8] For example, he famously explains that the injunction to 'heap coals of fire' on your enemy's head must be interpreted figuratively, since it cannot be an unchristian endorsement of vengeful violence, as an image teaching us to heap *kindness* on our enemies.[9] Made aware of the wrongness of their actions by such unmerited mercy, they will feel the *metaphorical* burning coals of remorse.[10]

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[5] Richard of St Victor, *Excerptiones*, II. 3, quoted in Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, p. 31.

[6] Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, VI. 11, quoted and translated in Brown, *Contrary Things*, p. 29.

[7] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, ed. by Gori, CXXVI. 11. English translation from Brown, *Contrary Things*, p. 32.

[8] Discussed further below.

[9] The image is from Proverbs 25. 22.

[10] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, ed. and trans. by Green, III. XVI. 24, pp. 156–57: 'Et cum possit dupliciter interpretari, uno modo ad nocendum, altero ad praestandum, ad beneficentiam te potius caritas revocet, ut intellegas carbones ignis esse urentes paenitentiae gemitus, quibus superbia sanatur eius qui dolet se inimicum fuisse hominis a quo eius miseriae subvenitur' ('Given that it can be interpreted in two ways, in the sense of causing harm and in the sense

The principle of interpretation that not even the least attentive student could miss was the idea of multiple levels, famously the four levels of meaning expressed in a Latin rhyme repeated at the start of Nicholas of Lyra's hugely influential work of biblical commentary, *Postilla litteralis super totam Bibliam*.

> Littera gesta docet
> quid credas allegoria
> quid agas tropologia
> quo tendas anagogia.

> [The letter teaches events
> allegory what you should believe
> tropology what you should do
> anagogy where you should aim.][11]

Other authorities distinguish as many as seven levels to match the seven seals of the book of Revelation. Angelom of Luxeuil, for example, applies seven levels of interpretation to the book of Kings, including the 'parabolic', an apparent contradiction that teaches a mystical truth.[12]

Multilevel approaches share the idea that interpretation can always add more meanings, but only some meanings are correct. As Aquinas puts it, 'Every truth that can be adapted to the sacred text, *without prejudice to the latter*, is the sense of holy Scripture'.[13] Abbot Wolberon († *c.* 1167), in his commentary on the Song of Songs, agrees with Augustine that the way to decide if an injunction should be taken literally or figuratively is to take it literally if it prohibits sin and enjoins good action, but figuratively if it appears not to, though his simile now seems more eccentric than illuminating:

> The two Testaments are said to be small murena-like fish, inasmuch as they can be bent and shaped into different kinds of explanatory narratives. They are, moreover,

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of offering something, the principle of love should lead you to the interpretation involving kindness, so that you understand by "coals of fire" the agonized groans of penitence which cure the pride of a person who regrets having been the enemy of someone who helped him in distress').

[11] Quotation and translation from Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, p. 20. For its earlier origins and influence, see de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, i, 1–14 and 74.

[12] See Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, pp. 41–42, and de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, i, 84–89.

[13] *On the Power of God*, trans. by Shapcote, cited in Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, p. 30. Emphasis mine.

amenable to many points of view, so long as nothing is said that is contrary to faith.[14]

In summary, then, for medieval exegetes, the meaning of scripture is endless but not unlimited. While welcoming the proliferation of correct interpretations, they reject the incorrect ones that cannot be 'adapted to the sacred text without prejudice'. From a modern perspective, medieval scholars might seem to be having their cake and eating it: all the fun of devising more and more elaborate glosses without compromising the idea of a single underlying truth. From a medieval perspective, while we cannot expect to find scholars voicing a desire to take interpretation beyond doctrinally sanctioned limits, we can, I think, find some awareness of the potential for problems around interpretation and epistemology in discussions of scriptural exegesis. A closer look at the nature of these concerns will help to see how they might become the subject of further experimentation in the fabliaux.

This awareness of potential problems with exegesis underlies medieval discussions of whether biblical meaning is found, is immanent in scripture, or is created by the act of interpretation. It shows up in the oft-repeated warnings against letting the untrained encounter scripture without proper guidance lest they misunderstand or allow their faith to be damaged by apparent contradictions. William of Auvergne warns that far-fetched interpretations of scripture endanger the credibility of Christianity and its scholars, citing exegesis of ii Samuel 11–12 that interprets the adulterous David as Christ and the innocent cuckold, Uriah, as the devil.[15]

Concern about accidental misleading of the ignorant offers a zone for relatively unthreatening doubts about interpretation. More alarming possibilities are raised by suggestions that skilled practitioners can go wrong, something recognized in frequent, vehement accusations that *other* exegetes are distorting scripture.[16] As Peter the Eater memorably warned,

> Sunt alii qui destruunt: hi sunt, qui evanuerunt in cogitationibus suis; qui imagines cordis sui in paginis sacrae Scripturae depingunt, qui litteram renitentem suis adinventionibus accommodant, et intellectum Scripturae usque ad sanguinem emungunt.

[14] Quoted and translated in de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, i, 81.

[15] Smalley, 'William of Auvergne', discussed in Smith, 'Uncertainty in the Study of the Bible', pp. 144–45.

[16] See Brown, *Contrary Things*, pp. 32–33, and de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, iii, 73–98.

[There are others who destroy: those who disappear into their own thoughts, who paint images of their minds on the pages of Holy Scripture, who accommodate the reluctant letter to their own inventions, and blow the nose of Scripture's meaning until it bleeds.][17]

Such accusations appear to leave the epistemological underpinnings of exegesis intact since they are levelled only at those whose practice of exegesis is deluded or depraved. But the possibility that even well-intentioned expert practitioners may err cannot, once acknowledged, be entirely erased. I would argue, then, that medieval scholars are prepared to give some space to doubts about interpretation and truth, albeit within a *cordon sanitaire* intended to confine problems to the realms of ignorance and error. The rest of this paper will examine how three different fabliaux could be read as investigating the possible consequences of epistemological doubts by trying out interpretative techniques in a relatively safe environment.

Jean Bodel's *Brunain, la vache au prestre* opens with a sermon on generosity, which asserts

> qu'il fesoit bon doner
> Por Dieu, qui reson entendoit,
> Que Dieus au double li rendoit
> Celui qui le fesoit de cuer.[18]

[that it was good to give for God, if you understood reason, since God would return it doubled if the giver was acting from the heart.]

As we might expect from a fabliau priest, the sermon seems based on a garbled version of scripture.[19] The preacher's motivation is clear since he is introduced as, 'dans Constans, | Qui a prendre bee toz tans' (Sir Constant, who is always gaping to grab whatever he can).[20]

Two of Constant's peasant parishioners heed the sermon and give him their cow, Blerain. But when the greedy priest tethers Blerain to his own larger cow,

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[17] Peter the Eater (Comestor), *Sermo* 2, quoted in and trans. by Brown, *Contrary Things*, p. 33, and discussed in de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, iii, 222. (The image of blowing scripture's nose stems, as de Lubac and Brown note, from Proverbs 30. 33.)

[18] Bodel, 'Brunain', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, ll. 6–9.

[19] Perhaps a combination of Luke 6. 38 ('Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure [...] For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again') and Mark 10. 29 ('There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold').

[20] Bodel, 'Brunain', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, ll. 31–32.

Brunain, she drags the latter back home to the delight of the peasants who happily conclude that 'Voirement est Dieus bon doublere!' (Truly God is a good doubler!).[21] Standard methods of exegesis yield the moral and allegorical interpretations (we should give to God; generosity will be rewarded). Unfortunately for Constant, the literal level turns out to be dominant (one cow out means two cows in). The three levels work together to reinforce the biblical teaching but destroy the interpretation Constant wanted to promote. But *Brunain* is no uplifting parable of simple faith rewarded. The peasants' motives are as venal as the priest's.

> Os, fet li vilains, bele suer,
> Que noz prestres a en couvent,
> Qui por Dieu done a escient,
> Que Dieus li fet mouteploier?
> Mieus ne poons nous emploier
> No vache, se bel te doit estre
> Que por Dieu le donons le prestre:
> Ausi rent ele petit lait!
> Sire, je vueil bien qui il l'ait,
> Fet la dame, par tel reson![22]

['Do you hear, good sister', said the peasant, 'how the priest is promising that anyone who deliberately makes a gift to God will get it multiplied by God? We couldn't make better use of our cow, if it pleased you, than giving her to the priest for God. Also, she doesn't yield much milk!' 'My lord, I'd gladly give her to him', said the lady, 'for that reason!']

The parodic courtly language highlights the uncourtly greed, emphasizing that the peasant couple offer Blerain to the priest solely in the hope of profit.

   With little or no moral message, what is left is the fun of playing with different levels of interpretation and the unintended consequences when these escape the exegete's control. For instance, Blerain's preference for her first home suggests that the peasants care for their literal flock better than the priest, who we know fleeces his metaphorical flock as hard as he can. A further interpretative irony is the repeated emphasis on sincerity in giving ('de cuer', 'a escient') voiced by characters whose only sincere impulse is greed.

   Like many fabliaux, *Brunain* offers additional interpretation in the form of a closing gloss or moral. As is typical of fabliaux morals, this seems a poor fit

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[21] Bodel, 'Brunain', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, l. 59.

[22] Bodel, 'Brunain', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, ll. 10–19.

with the story it supposedly interprets. In fact, there are multiple poor fits since no fewer than three different glosses are offered in the closing lines:

> Par example dist cis fabliaus
> Que fols est qui ne s'abandone:
> Cil a le bien qui Dieu le done,
> Non cil qui le muce et enfuet.
> Nus hom mouteploier ne puet
> Sanz grant eür, c'est or del mains;
> Par grant eür ot li vilains
> Deus vaches et li prestres nule:
> Tels cuide avancier qui recule![23]

[This fabliau tells by example that a man is a fool not to renounce self-interest: the one who gave to God got the asset, not the one who hid and concealed it. No man can multiply unless he has great good fortune, that's obvious now. The peasant was very lucky to get two cows while the priest got none. Some think they are going forwards when really they're going backwards!]

The proposed morals not only fail to provide a satisfactory interpretation, but also conflict and/or overlap to such an extent that it becomes difficult to identify or count them. Yes, the story has shown how the peasants gained the priest's cow because they were willing to give up theirs, and this is indeed due mostly to good fortune, certainly not to genuine generosity. As for the importance of not hiding or burying possessions, this cannot be applied literally to the story as told since there is no question of hiding the cows. If we take 'muce et enfuet' more figuratively, as holding tightly to possessions, the fit is poor to the point of reversing the stated meaning: the priest loses both cows because he does *not* confine them securely in contrast with the peasant who immediately thinks how he will get them both in his 'toitiaus' (shed).[24] Only the last line with its schadenfreude and cynicism seems to fit both the story and the text's approach to meaning and interpretation. By a last twist, it neatly illustrates part of the biblical text on which Constant seemed to draw for his sermon, albeit not the part he wanted to highlight: 'many that are first shall be last; and the last first'.[25]

*Brunain* is unusual in taking scriptural text as its starting point for interpretation. A rather different fabliau, *Le Lai d'Aristote*, hinges on competing inter-

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[23]  Bodel, 'Brunain', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, ll. 64–72.

[24]  Bodel, 'Brunain', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, l. 63.

[25]  Mark 10. 31.

pretations of material that, while not sacred, is still imbued with considerable authority: ancient history and, in its conclusion, the sayings of Cato.[26] It tells how the young Alexander is reproached by his teacher, Aristotle, for spending too much time with his mistress, Phyllis, who seeks to discredit Aristotle and so regain Alexander's freedom. She sets up a seduction scene which Alexander observes unseen from a window. Aristotle is overcome by lust against which all his learning and cleverness is powerless (though it does enable him to engage himself in a kind of Socratic dialogue about the experience). He agrees to let Phyllis saddle and bridle him and ride him around the garden. Once the teacher's humiliation is complete, Alexander can appear and condemn Aristotle's failure to follow his own precepts.

So far, then, the *Aristote* presents us with a fairly straightforward case of old and tedious authority vanquished by the energy and wiles of youth, but the picture becomes more complicated as soon as we consider the interpretation on which it hinges. Phyllis has shown Alexander his teacher's weakness, which the lovers interpret as an invalidation of his teaching. Aristotle, however, is able to put a new meaning on the literal, historical occurrence, one that maintains his intellectual and moral authority. He achieves this by using exegetical methods to transform his lapse into an *exemplum* in support of the very teaching he failed to follow.

In fact, interpretation appears as a major — perhaps *the* major — theme of *Aristote* right from the opening lines with emphasis on *beax moz* (fine speech/ words), followed up with an extended lament about the prevalence of the opposite, *mesdit* (ill speech/slander).[27] At this point, the text's main concerns seem to be not with events or persons but with the intent and technique of the teller. It is not until line 42 that the narrator seems to remember the story.

> Or revenrai a mon traitié
> D'un affaire que g'enpris ai,
> Dont l'aventure molt prisai
> Quant g'en oi la matiere oïe,
> Qui bien doit estre desploïe

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[26] As often, the *Lai d'Aristote*'s fabliau genre membership is unclear. It qualifies according to Nykrog, *Les Fabliaux*, and *Recueil général et complet*, ed. by de Montaiglon and Raynaud, but is not included in *Nouveau receuil complet des fabliaux*, ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard. Brook and Burgess (Henri de Valenciennes, *The Lay of Aristote*, p. 36) sum it up as follows: 'All in all, *Aristote* could be said to belong to a small group of lays and fabliaux that fulfil the criteria for a lay, but also that for a fabliau.'

[27] Henri de Valenciennes, 'Le Lai d'Aristote', ed. by Corbellari, ll. 1–41.

> Et dite par rime et retraite,
> Sanz vilanie et sanz retraite.[28]

[Now I will return to my subject, an affair I've undertaken whose story I valued highly when I heard the matter, which should be developed well, spoken in rhyme and recounted without vulgarity or reproach.]

Again, the manner in which the narrator develops and presents his *matiere* — its presentation and interpretation — seems rather more important than the matter itself. We will wait until line 64 for the first indication of plot or characters.

Given the narrator's concern with wording and presentation of his story, it is surely not an accident that Aristotle, despite his role as victim of Phyllis's stratagem, is repeatedly described in admiring tones. He is 'Aristotes, qui tot savoit | Quanqu'an droite clergie avoit' (Aristotle who knew all things that were part of true learning); he counsels Alexander 'belement' (politely/skilfully). Even at the moment of his greatest humiliation, he remains 'le meillor clerc du mont' (the best scholar in the world), his defeat couched in incongruously authoritative terms: 'cil qui prevoz ert et maire | De la folie qui le maire' (He was bailiff and steward of the folly that mastered him).[29] It would be entirely possible to read such praise of Aristotle as sarcasm, but the use of so many positive terms at least raises the possibility of admiration. Thus, we must either take it at face value or as reinforcing the possibility of multiple, often conflicting, interpretations.

Praise could also be a rhetorical strategy to highlight the contrasting depth of Aristotle's degradation, but other elements of the story contribute to a more positive portrayal of the philosopher than its events might suggest; Phyllis's seduction trick is not the only clever reversal here. It is equalled or surpassed by Aristotle's immediate recovery, which he achieves precisely by applying the interpretative skills and techniques of exegesis to his situation. As he points out, the fact that love has made a fool out of a wise old man only goes to show how right he was to warn his pupil of its dangers, which, he insists, are even greater for the young and hot-blooded.[30] Like Aquinas looking for interpretations without prejudice to the sacred text, Aristotle needs to find an interpretation of his own behaviour without prejudice to his authority. He may not be

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[28] Henri de Valenciennes, 'Le Lai d'Aristote', ed. by Corbellari, ll. 42–48.

[29] Henri de Valenciennes, 'Le Lai d'Aristote', ed. by Corbellari, ll. 159–60, 145, 449, and 402–03. English terms from *The Lay of Aristote*, ed. and trans. by Brook and Burgess, p. 65 (note to the translation of l. 317).

[30] Henri de Valenciennes, 'Le Lai d'Aristote', ed. by Corbellari, ll. 482–504.

able to stop Alexander spending time with Phyllis, but he does emerge with his academic credibility largely unscathed thanks to the surprise and humour in the way he turns the situation inside out. The text emphasizes how much Alexander appreciates the skill and amusement value of Aristotle's interpretative trick:

> Molt s'est rescous et bel et gent
> [...]
> Mais tant s'en fu bien escusés
> De ce quë il fu amusés,
> Qu'en riant li rois li pardone.[31]

> [He recovered himself very skilfully and elegantly [...]. But he had excused himself so well for the way he had been made a fool of that the king laughed and pardoned him.]

Is all the laughter here admiring or is some directed at Aristotle's sophistry? On the whole, the tone seems more one of sincere admiration for his interpretative skill than of cynical chuckling over academic propensities to prove that black is white. Fabliau readers soon learn to approach narratorial commentary with scepticism, but there is no denying in this case that Aristotle's point is valid. Everything that happens only helps to demonstrate love's (or lust's) power to obliterate awareness of other responsibilities. Alexander and Phyllis may evade the attempt to keep them apart, but they have been made to acknowledge the problems their love poses for Alexander as ruler and general.

Aristotle's superior skill and wisdom emerges most clearly in contrast to Alexander's own flat-footed efforts. When Aristotle first reproves the prince for neglecting his barons 'por l'amor d'une estrange fame' (for love of a foreign woman), Alexander's first reaction is to seek refuge in a deliberate misinterpretation of the indefinite article 'une' as a numeral.[32] The resulting criticism, that he is wasting his time with just one woman rather than several, is easy to counter: Do his accusers not understand that true love must be for just one woman? Aristotle, however, is not so easily misled. He persists with his point, the text stressing his great learning and knowledge, until Alexander agrees to renounce Phyllis. Clearly, the use of interpretation to deflect criticism requires skill, and Aristotle is more skilled than his pupil.

However, for all the admiration of Aristotle's learning, there remain hints of underlying anxiety about interpretation. For one thing, the couplet about

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[31] Henri de Valenciennes, 'Le Lai d'Aristote', ed. by Corbellari, ll. 505 and 512–14.

[32] Henri de Valenciennes, 'Le Lai d'Aristote', ed. by Corbellari, ll. 141–83 and 109.

the power of love is accompanied by a different gloss in the form of a Latin quotation from Cato: 'Turpe est doctori cum culpa redarguit ipsum' (Shame on the teacher when his guilt contradicts his teaching).[33] This seems to provide an interpretation that not only fits the story but is backed up by the full 'auctorité' of a named classical writer, in Latin, no less, with a further gloss to explain it in French.[34] Yet this apparently conclusive interpretation, with its clear criticism of Aristotle, is offered only to be immediately dismissed. Yes, the text concedes, Aristotle reproved Alexander for giving in to love and then succumbed to it himself, but, the text asks, 'en doit il estre en mal repris?' (should he be condemned for that?).[35] 'Nenil' (no, he should not) is the resounding answer in the next line. He should not be condemned because love forced him to do it, it was only natural, it was not his fault, and he did not do it through learning ('apresure').[36] The argument that Aristotle's fault would be greater if it resulted from learning seems particularly odd, as does the way these defences of Aristotle, the great scholar, here undermine the authority of Cato and Latin scholarship in general.

There is always the possibility that the text's juxtaposition of Cato and Aristotle makes reference to scholarly factional battles, for instance over the status of Aristotelian logic in the curriculum, but I find it more likely that the text simply combines admiration for Aristotle as a metonym for learning and intelligence with an uncomfortable awareness of their limitations.[37] After all, the story shows Aristotle subject not only to nature but to the whims of a king he can easily out-talk and out-think. It is notable that Alexander forgives his teacher 'en riant'. Aristotle survives his mistake not just because he presents a strong argument but simply because he makes Alexander laugh. The greatest scholar in the world, champion exegete, seems not so far removed from the jester and *fableor*. The complex relation between truth and interpretation is shown to be subject to relations of power.

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[33] Henri de Valenciennes, 'Le Lai d'Aristote', ed. by Corbellari, l. 523. Multiple, mutually incompatible morals are one feature of *Le Lai d'Aristote* that marks it out as a fabliau.

[34] Henri de Valenciennes, 'Le Lai d'Aristote', ed. by Corbellari, l. 520.

[35] Henri de Valenciennes, 'Le Lai d'Aristote', ed. by Corbellari, l. 537.

[36] My paraphrase of Henri de Valenciennes, 'Le Lai d'Aristote', ed. by Corbellari, ll. 538–44.

[37] Though it would be tempting to make connections here with Brown's account of the contrast between monastic exegesis (embracing multiplicity of meaning) and the Aristotelian dialectic of the urban schools (approaching truth via logical opposition and the elimination of contradictions). See Brown, *Contrary Things*, pp. 34–37.

In any case, the multiple arguments put forward for exempting Aristotle from Cato's condemnation look like a classic case of overdetermination. Having presented us with a perfectly good and very authoritative-looking Latin moralization, the text seems to have second thoughts, scrambling to save Aristotle's reputation any way it can. Once again, the difficulty of fabliau morals is not so much whether a moral accords with the story as whether it accords with the other morals. The appearance of yet another apparently conclusive moral does little to resolve this:

> Henris ceste aventure fine,
> Qui dit et demonstre en la fin
> C'on ne puet desevrer [some MSS: decevoir.] cuer fin.[38]

[Henri has finished this story that tells and shows in the end that you can't separate/deceive a pure heart.]

This seems to hand ultimate triumph to courtly *fin amor*. While this arguably applies to Alexander and Phyllis, the text makes it clear that Aristotle was overcome by bestial lust, far removed from *fin amor*, thus invalidating his argument that he and Alexander succumb to the same force. Or perhaps *cuer fin* should be taken to refer to Aristotle and translated more along the lines of 'wise spirit'. If we add the possibility of reading *C'on* as *con* (cunt), an additional, obscene, layer of interpretation appears.[39]

So, *Aristote* shows the power and utility of interpretation for getting scholars out of tricky situations. Aristotle's status as a learned man and his ability to persuade Alexander both work to develop this theme. But the last part, just where we might expect closure, gives us a series of incompatible interpretations and consequent implicit unease about the value of scholarship, especially faced with the power of kings or of nature.

The final text I want to examine is Rutebeuf's *Frere Denise*, which provides a clear example of the way interpretation can proliferate in the fabliaux. Here, the starting point comes not from scripture, Greece, or Rome, but from a genre with its own claims to tradition and authority. It opens with a proverb.

> Li abiz ne fait pas l'ermite:
> S'uns hom en hermitage habite,

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[38]  Henri de Valenciennes, 'Le Lai d'Aristote', ed. by Corbellari, ll. 545–47.

[39]  Henri de Valenciennes, 'Le Lai d'Aristote', ed. by Corbellari, ll. 547. The obscene reading would put the text firmly among the fabliaux and explode the narrator's lengthily expressed determination to avoid all vulgarity (ll. 42–60).

> S'il est de povres draz vestuz,
> Je ne pris mie deus festuz
> Son habit ne sa vesteüre
> S'il ne mainne vie ausi pure
> Coume ses habiz nos demoustre.[40]

[The habit doesn't make the hermit: if a man lives in a hermitage, if he dresses in poor clothes, I don't give two straws for his habit or his clothing unless the life he lives is as pure as his habit indicates.]

The following lines elaborate on the theme of misleading appearances but introduce a new image. Its associations of beauty and barrenness not only complicate the figure of the false hermit, but produce disturbing implications as the story unfolds.

> Mais mainte gens fount bele moustre
> Et mervilleuz semblant qu'il vaillent;
> Il semblent les aubres qui faillent,
> Qui furent trop bel au florir:
> Bien dovroient teil gent morir
> Vilainnement et a grant honte![41]

[But many people put on a fine appearance and give a marvellous impression of their worth; they are like trees that blossom too beautifully and then fail. It would be good if such people died nastily and in great shame!]

Confusion is only increased as the next lines present a new proverb, still on the theme of false seeming, but now from the opposite angle.

> Uns proverbes dit et raconte
> Que tout n'est pas ors c'on voit luire;
> Por ce m'estuet, ainz que je muire,
> Faire un flabel d'une aventure
> De la plus bele criature
> Que hom puisse troveir ne querre
> De Paris juqu'en Aingleterre.[42]

[A proverb tells us and recounts that all that glitters is not gold. For this reason, before I die, I must make a fabliau about an adventure and about the most beautiful creature that could be found or looked for all the way from Paris to England.]

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[40] Rutebeuf, 'Frere Denise', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, ll. 1–7.

[41] Rutebeuf, 'Frere Denise', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, ll. 8–13.

[42] Rutebeuf, 'Frere Denise', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, ll. 14–20.

Readers may feel at this point that *Frere Denise* has more gloss than text — unless of course the *story* is presented to explain the *proverbs*, as 'por ce' (for this reason) suggests. Denise, a beautiful virgin, is betrothed to a young nobleman but chooses to preserve her virginity by disguising herself as a man and becoming a friar. This echoes the lives of several transvestite saints known at the time, although one might question how well it fits any of the opening proverbs.[43]

Like the more canonical transvestite saints, Denise, tonsured and cross-dressed but retaining her androgynous name, is accepted into the Franciscan Order. Secret identity aside, she becomes a model friar.

> Par sa contenance desut
> Touz ses freres frere Denize:
> Cortoiz fu et de grant servize.
> Frere Denize mout amerent
> Tuit li frere qui laians erent.[44]

[Brother Denise deceived all his brothers by his countenance. And he was courtly and very obliging. All the brothers who were in there loved Brother Denise.][45]

However, in Denise's case there's an additional secret:

> Mais plus l'amoit frere Symons!
> Sovent se metoit es limons
> Com cil qui n'en ert pas retraiz,
> Et il s'i amoit mieulz qu'es traiz:
> Mout ot en li boen limonier.
> Vie menoit de pautonier
> Et ot guerpi vie d'apostre;
> Et cele aprist sa pater nostre,
> Que volentiers la recevoit.[46]

[But brother Simon loved him the most! He often put himself 'in harness' like one who is not a real monk [has not 'withdrawn' from the world] and he liked it here better than at his prayer book: he was a really good cart-horse. He lived a rascal's life and had abandoned his vocation. And she learned her *pater noster* and received it willingly.][47]

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[43] For transvestite saints, see Abdalla, 'Theology and Culture' and Grayson, 'Disruptive Disguises'.

[44] Rutebeuf, 'Frere Denise', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, ll. 166–70.

[45] English translation from Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 245.

[46] Rutebeuf, 'Frere Denise', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, ll. 171–79.

[47] English translation from Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 245.

As Simon Gaunt has explained, it is not only clear that Denise's prized virginity is long gone by line 180, but there are layers upon layers of innuendo. The cart-horse between the shafts is a familiar medieval sexual image, easily developed with further details, and even 'pater nostre' becomes obscene in this loaded context.[48] So at this point, we have Brother Symon, a sinful lecher and cor-rupter of youth, and we have Brother Denise, a girl with initially pure inten-tions, but now physically and morally compromised. Both look like friars and have the official status to match, but each requires rather different interpreta-tion of the initial proverb about habits, or of the secondary one about gold and glitter, not to mention the barren fruit tree. Symon is a friar in garment and body, but not in spirit. Denise is a friar in garment, initially in spirit (though this becomes more and more dubious) but definitely not in body. As Gaunt points out, the sexual innuendo is subtly present before Denise becomes a friar. Once we know about the carthorse, we start to notice hints that perhaps Denise was always moved by sexual rather than pious urges. For example, that Symon 'enchanta' Denise could mean that he put her under a spell or that she was sexually attracted to him. Once this interpretation is suggested, we cannot help but wonder exactly how she was of 'grant servize' to all the other friars.[49]

What makes this interesting in terms of exegesis is the way a relatively obvi-ous interpretation of loaded words like 'limons' and 'limonier' (shafts and cart-horse) encourages further, less obvious interpretations of more neutral seeming ones, like 'enchanta'. This seems to enact the exegetes' dilemma: Once we start to interpret (and how can we not start?) is it ever necessary or even possible to stop? One interpretation leads to another. Is there a truth at the bottom or is it interpretation all the way down? I see *Frere Denise* as exploring that dilemma, not only in the way that its interpretations proliferate but in the way that it blurs the distinction between text and gloss by leaving it ambiguous whether the proverbs are included to explain the story or the story is recounted in order to illustrate the proverbs.

Either way, trying to connect the story with the proverbs soon leads to the kind of fine distinctions familiar in biblical exegesis. If the literal meaning of gold is a precious metal, its allegorical meaning here is virtuous life; a moral meaning exhorts choosing the true gold of virtue over the glitter of wealth; its anagogical meaning might be the light of heaven that is virtue's reward, or that the soul, like gold, will not tarnish. Perhaps we can find a parabolic meaning

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[48] Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, pp. 242–48.

[49] Rutebeuf, 'Frere Denise', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, l. 36 ('Enchanta') and l. 168 ('grant servize').

in the truth underlying this contradiction of using precious metal to represent poverty. A medieval commentator could gloss it better and at much greater length. My point here is that *Frere Denise* generates proliferating interpretations to compete with the most enthusiastic scriptural commentaries.[50]

Interpretation is complicated further as the story continues. The alleged friars visit a knight whose wife perceives that Denise is a woman and decides to help her. The two women conspire to bring about a happy ending, dressing Denise as a woman again and arranging her wedding to the young man she spurned at the start (paid for by extorting money from Symon). They assure her mother and future husband that she is still a virgin, though they clearly know this is a lie.

> La dame par sa grant franchise
> Retint damoizele Denise;
> N'onques de riens ne l'esfrea,
> Mais mout doucement li pria
> Qu'ele fust trestoute seüre
> Que ja de nule creature
> Ne sera ses secreiz seüz,
> Ne qu'ele ait a home geü
> Ainz sera mout bien mariee.[51]

[The lady, being of very noble character, kept Damsel Denise with her and did nothing that might frighten her, but begged her very gently to be completely confident that no living creature would ever know her secret nor that she had lain with a man, but on the contrary she would be very well married.]

The habit did not make Denise a friar, but it seems a new dress does make her not only a woman but a virgin bride. The dress reveals one truth while concealing another. Can we interpret this as confirming the proverb of the habit — the deceitful friar's garb removed to reveal the truth? Should we continue using that proverb, or one of the other glosses, to interpret the whole story? If we apply the second proverb, 'all that glitters is not gold', Denise's dress is revealed as another false covering: she glitters without being real gold. This seems the more plausible reading, but how then to gloss the success of the ploy and the

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[50] For example, Bloch (*The Scandal of the Fabliaux*, pp. 44–45) interprets it as demonstrating the impossibility of inherent meaning in language; Gaunt (*Gender and Genre*, pp. 242–48) reads it as exposing the performative nature of gender; others have interpreted it as satirical in the light of Rutebeuf's well-known hostility to the Franciscans; for example, Rayborn, *Against the Friars*, pp. 106–16.

[51] Rutebeuf, 'Frere Denise', ed. by Noomen and van den Boogaard, ll. 287–95.

narrator's approval of it? A grimmer interpretation could follow from another of the opening statements, that dissemblers should die a shameful death, but this is not what the story shows happening. The third interpretative figure offered in the opening lines, the tree that flowers beautifully but then fails to fruit, only adds to the confusion. Denise was introduced as the greatest beauty one could hope to find between Paris and England, so perhaps we are meant to blame what follows on this too-beautiful flowering. But following that thread can only lead us to wonder if she might be pregnant by the time she dons her bridal gown, which further confuses any moral message.

Again we have the problem of deciding where interpretation should end. Clearly Symon is a false friar and deserves punishment, but why not go on to apply the same to Denise, ex-false friar and now false virgin, or to the lady who devises and enables the deceit? Perhaps what we are dealing with is a very literal application of Augustine's dictum mentioned earlier: 'Obscurius positum est, ut multos intellectus generet, et ditiores discedant homines' ('It is put down obscurely so that it might generate many meanings and men might come away richer').[52] The more layers cover Denise's naked truth, the more prosperity she attracts.

*Frere Denise* is arguably extreme in the explicit foregrounding of its proliferation of incompatible or overlapping interpretations, but it is also representative of the fabliaux in general, both in its gleeful disregard for ethics and in its fascination with multiple interpretations of seemingly trivial matter. The lack of ethics is in complete contrast with serious medieval thought, but the concern with multiple meanings is in keeping with medieval ideas on exegesis.

Of course, excessive proliferation of meanings would be avoidable if only we could define the truth contained in scripture and use it as a litmus test to identify where interpretation should start and finish. The most influential such test was Augustine's principle that exegesis should be led by charity. According to Augustine, where the literal sense of a text accords with charity, it is to be accepted; where it does not we must look for further senses until we reach one that does.[53] (It was his application of the principle of *caritas* that produced the

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[52] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, ed. by Gori, cxxvi. 11. English translation from Brown, *Contrary Things*, p. 32.

[53] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, III, x, 14–15, ed. and trans. by Green, pp. 146–49: 'Demonstrandus est igitur prius modus inveniendae locutionis, propriane an figurata sit. [...] *Non autem praecipit Scriptura nisi caritatem*, nec culpat nisi cupiditatem' ('We must first explain the way to discover whether an expression is literal or figurative. [...] *Scripture enjoins nothing but love* [charity] and censures nothing but lust [cupidity]') (my emphasis).

interpretation of burning coals as a metaphor for kindness discussed earlier.) Following Augustine, Isaac of Stella (*c.* 1100 – *c.* 1170s) writes:

> It often happens that those who disagree about the same Scriptural passages or who espouse different ideas about things can be in the highest agreement or harmony with the Holy Spirit. This is only provided that there has been a decision made not to disagree with the truth of the faith, the building up of charity, and the rooting out of cupidity.[54]

It is easy to apply this notion of multiple possible meanings, all justified so long as they encourage charity, to texts like *Brunain* and *Frere Denise*, at least for restricted values of charity. In the former text, both priest and peasants try to select the level of interpretation that results in charity in the sense of transfer of wealth towards themselves. In the end, the cows settle the question in favour of the literal level. In *Denise*, charity could be claimed as the endpoint of all that occurs: charity in the form of forgiveness and restored status for Denise, and material benevolence, whether willingly offered or extracted under duress from Symon and the Franciscans. So, in a sense, fabliau exegetes — both characters and narrators — seem to follow Augustine's principle of interpreting until charity is found, then stopping there. The irony, of course, is that they understand charity in the most venal, literal sense possible. The seeming generosity of the peasants in *Brunain* was always motivated by a desire for gain and ceases abruptly once they succeed in doubling their cow. Interpretation of Denise's appearance stops where benevolence is heaped upon her. Aristotle and Alexander are less venal, but also want to stop interpretation at the level that best serves their own desires. In these three texts, charity is less a final truth than a flimsy disguise for the cupidity that underlies both actions and interpretations. The methods and principles of scriptural exegesis have led us to the very vice they were supposed to root out.

Following the letter rather than the spirit of Augustine, characters in all three texts strive for their own ends, applying his methods while missing or denying the main point of his teaching. Whether we take this as evidence of the failings of humanity, of the pitfalls of flawed interpretation, or of fundamental problems with exegesis itself is left open. The central position of interpretation in the fabliaux emerges not only from its role as a driver of plot but more specifically from the texts' enthusiasm for multiple ill-fitting glosses, and their preoccupation with forms of language such as proverbs or Latin and traditional sayings. These provide ideal material for experimenting with exegesis in that they

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[54] Quoted and translated in de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, I, 81.

share many properties of scripture, being ancient, fixed, familiar, authoritative, yet often contradictory, and at the same time they lack the sacredness that sets scripture apart from all other texts. My contention is that these frivolous texts thus offer a low-risk environment for conducting thought experiments on exegetical methods, perhaps exposing insecurities too dangerous for more serious contexts, perhaps just for the enjoyment of playing with meaning free from serious consequences. They thus offer excellent testing grounds for exploring the consequences of discarding established safeguards on exegesis. While it might be argued that all interpretation is a thought experiment, it is possible to read the fabliaux as texts that experiment with exegesis in an alternative realm, one where rules can be broken for entertainment without fear of consequences for the interpreter's career or salvation.

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# Queer Arts of Failure in Alan of Lille and Hue of Rotelande

## Daniel Reeve

Medieval romances — narratives that describe the trials and successes of their aristocratic heroes — are experimental texts in several important senses. Early romances, in particular, were at the forefront of a radical reimagining of possibilities for vernacular textual production: the twelfth-century efflorescence of narrative fiction.[1] As Douglas Kelly notes, narrators of romance characteristically 'insist on the truth of their *matiere*, and thus of the romance and the marvels it relates', even as they recount obviously untrue stories: they are referring to a truth distinct from factual narration.[2] By distinguishing (as nearly all romance fictions implicitly do) between the fictive invention of their textual surfaces and the truth which is claimed to lie below the surface, these texts create a discursive space in which questions of ethics ('How should a knight act?'), ontology ('What is love?'), and epistemology ('What truths does this text in fact contain?') can be discussed, not by means of direct argumentation but rather *par esperiment* (that is, experientially or experimentally). Thus characterized, early romances are thought experiments whose concern is to demonstrate that truth can inhere in fiction, and to further assert their capacity to explore certain specific truths by means of narrative development.

[1] The classic study is Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance*.

[2] Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance*, pp. 210–11.

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These developments took place alongside a parallel movement in Latin writing, closely associated with the cathedral school at Chartres, which insisted that truth could be found under the surface of pre-Christian fiction. For writers such as William of Conches and Bernard Silvestris, some pagan texts concealed a hidden truth, cloaked in an outer appearance of falseness (*integumentum* or *involucrum*), and available to the exegetically competent reader.[3] And some of these authors, like their romance-writing contemporaries, turned to narrative literary forms to set out and explore their ideas, following the late antique models given by Boethius in the *De consolatione Philosophiae* and Martianus Capellanus in the *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*. Like their contemporary romances, twelfth-century narrative philosophy appears to proceed from the axiomatic notion that fiction can conceal truth below its literal surface.

Despite similarities between these literary and philosophical movements, it is difficult to find evidence of self-conscious intertextual traffic between them. Although it is clear that romance writers like Chrétien de Troyes had a deep familiarity with the arts of at least the *trivium*, and that they applied their knowledge of these arts to the structural and rhetorical composition of their romances, it is more difficult to show that they were directly conversant with, for instance, Chartrian philosophical allegory, though some accounts of early romance have identified areas of similarity.[4] There is, however, at least one example of a twelfth-century romance which makes unmistakeable direct reference to a contemporary work of Latin narrative philosophy. As Penny Eley has shown, the concluding section of Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon* (an insular French romance written in *c.* 1180)[5] is a parody of the last chapter of Alan of Lille's *De planctu Naturae*, an allegorical prosimetrum (probably written in *c.* 1160)[6] in the tradition of Neoplatonic allegories such as the *Cosmographia* of Bernard Silvestris.[7] Among other similarities, described in greater detail below,

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[3] On this movement, see for instance de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, ii, 125–262. R. W. Southern (*Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, i, 58–101) has questioned the association of these writers with the school at Chartres; what is important to this essay, however, is their similarity of approach.

[4] Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance*, demonstrates exhaustively that vernacular French romance uses 'a paradigm for invention adopted and adapted principally from medieval Latin traditions' (p. xiii). Vance, *From Topic to Tale*, is a useful study of Chrétien and the *trivium*. On the similarities between the Bernardine concept of *silva/hyle* and the forest setting of many romances, see Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, pp. 19–24.

[5] See Hue de Rotelande, *Ipomedon*, ed. by Holden, pp. 7–11.

[6] See Alan de Lille, *Textes inédits*, ed. by d'Alverny, p. 34.

[7] Eley, 'Sex and Writing'.

both texts narrate a scene in which an authoritative figure pronounces a sentence of excommunication upon sexual deviants. This source-identification has broken new ground for our understanding of *Ipomedon*; however, no account of the text has yet attempted to tease out the implications of Hue's audacious, bizarre move. We still lack a satisfactory answer to the question of why Hue would choose to make reference to such an apparently unlikely text. Eley accounts for the presence of the *De planctu* in *Ipomedon* by characterizing the reference as an erudite in-joke aimed at Latin-literate members of Hue's audience.[8] This reading fits into her broader characterization of *Ipomedon* as a poem which seeks to frustrate its reader through 'the systematic blocking of every avenue of interpretation by the sustained marshalling of red herrings, internal contradictions, and logical conundrums'.[9] In other words, Eley argues that the reference is designed to split its audience as a selectively legible symbol (and legitimating device) of erudition, but one which would frustrate any attempt to follow up its implications. The *De planctu* is, of course, not the only text that could have performed this function; Eley's argument does not therefore account for the presence of the *De planctu* specifically in *Ipomedon*, only the presence of a text of similar intellectual exclusivity. By contrast, I suggest here that the specific presence of the *De planctu* in *Ipomedon* is of deep significance to our broader understanding of the romance.

The purpose of this essay, then, is to bring twelfth-century romance into a closer dialogue with its contemporary philosophical contexts, and to explore and characterize the philosophical work performed by the texts I discuss. The fact that both of these texts are fictional narratives is not incidental to this work; in fact, I claim that it is fundamental. Both *Ipomedon* and *De planctu* work to show that certain kinds of knowledge can only be generated in the textual space opened up by narrative fiction. As I will argue, this has serious implications for the demonstrative power of systematic argumentation, which must, as a consequence of its need for generalized truths, avoid the contingent, subjective experiential mode at the core of all fiction.

I begin by offering an interpretation of *De planctu*, and then proceed to revisit and extend Eley's source-identification in order to think about how

[8] Eley, 'Sex and Writing', p. 103.

[9] Eley, 'The Subversion of Meaning', p. 98. Other critics have read the poem as being essentially serious (Spensley, 'The Structure of Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon*' and Hanning, 'Engin in Twelfth-Century Romance'), or as a gentle parody that stops short of subverting the literary conventions about which it jokes (Crane, *Insular Romace*, pp. 158–74; Calin, 'The Exaltation and Undermining of Romance'; Field, '*Ipomedon* to *Ipomadon A*'; and Krueger, 'Misogyny, Manipulation, and the Female Reader').

Hue's engagement with the *De planctu* affects our understanding of *Ipomedon* (and vice versa). As I will show, this engagement goes far beyond the single recognized intertextual reference: traces of, and responses to, Alan's distinctive poetics can be found throughout Hue's romance. Both texts share an overriding concern with language, signification, pleasure, sexual deviance, and reproduction, and with the connections between these categories. An investigation of the relationship between these two remarkable texts furnishes us with an important set of tools with which to understand Hue's poetics, and the philosophical grounds of his scathing parody of the *roman courtois*. This intertext provides us with a philosophical context for interpreting *Ipomedon*: Hue's poem, rather than simply revelling in the frustrations engendered by its convoluted form, seeks to make a serious point about the relationship between sign-systems and reality — a concern found also in Alan's *De planctu*, as well as in twelfth-century philosophy more widely. Hue, I shall argue, criticizes his contemporary romance-writers' insistence that they were producing truth and, in doing so, makes his own contribution to a series of philosophical/literary discourses about the relationship between language and reality. In this sense, its objectives and concerns bear remarkable similarities to those of the *De planctu*.

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Penny Eley's characterization of *Ipomedon* as a text which seeks to frustrate and destabilize its reader could equally be applied to the *De planctu*. Alan of Lille's 'notoriously difficult' allegory shares its prosimetric form with Boethius's *De consolatione Philosophiae*, a text which it clearly imitates in many respects.[10] Both texts consist of a dialogue between a first-person narrator and an apparently authoritative, instructive personification: Philosophy in the *De consolatione* and Nature in the *De planctu*. Both of these figures wear clothing with figurative significance, but while Philosophy's dress has been torn by Stoic and Epicurean philosophers,[11] Nature's tunic is torn where its embroidered depiction of creation portrays rational humanity (II. 28). Humanity itself is the perpetrator of this destruction, which is a crime *contra naturam* in more than one sense: as Nature later explains, 'plerique homines in suam matrem vitiorum armentur iniuriis' (VIII. 24, 'many men assail their mother with the injurious

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[10] Johnson, '*Translatio Ganymedis*', p. 173; Marenbon, *Boethius*, p. 179.

[11] Boethius, *De consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. by Moreschini, I, pr. 3, ll. 20–25. Marenbon, *Boethius*, pp. 153–54.

weapons of the vices'), forcing her to display her body 'meretricaliter' ('in the manner of a prostitute').[12]

The disposition towards vice that causes humanity to act in this way was caused by Venus, Nature's delegated assistant, who rebels against Nature's orthodoxy because of the monotonous sameness of her task, 'terrestrium animantium materiandae propagini' (x. 2, 'the propagation of earthly life in its material aspect'). Nature requires Venus to follow her orthographical prescriptions: rules of sexual conduct expressed by means of a complex series of metaphors whose vehicles are taken from the lexical fields of craftsmanship, writing, rhetoric, logic, and above all, grammar.[13] Venus is forbidden from straying into *falsigraphia*: a divergence from the rules of grammar that allow us to avoid solecism, barbarism, and vice.[14] Despite this prohibition, Venus neglects her work, rejects her husband Hymanaeus (who here represents the sacrament of marriage), and becomes instead the concubine of Antigenius. Venus's failure in her duty to maintain the process of natural sexual reproduction causes humanity to fall into sin and death.

> Fatique falcem in messem humani generis nimium excursare permittens, dampnum nulla novi seminis rediviva pensabat origine; sed potius se gramaticis constructionibus destruens, dialecticis conversionibus invertens, rethoricis coloribus decolorans, suam artem in figuram, figuramque in vitium transferebat. (x. 12)

> [She allowed the scythe of fate to attack the human race in a continual reaping, and provided no revivifying growth of new seed to compensate for this destruction. Instead, destructive in her grammatical constructions, perverse in her dialectical conversions, using rhetorical colours only to discolour, she turned art into figure, figure into vice.]

Venus's betrayal thus destroys the reproductive capacity of both sexuality and language; sexual deviance condemns the human race to a death from which Venus once protected them. This passage is one of many in *De planctu* to link non-generative sexuality (in other words, sodomy) with bad grammar and stylistic excess.[15] In Jan Ziolkowski's words,

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[12] References to the text are taken from Alan of Lille, *De planctu*, in *Literary Works*, ed. and trans. by Wetherbee, henceforth referenced by chapter and line number in main text. All translations are taken from this edition.

[13] Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex*, is a comprehensive study of these metaphors.

[14] These are all technical terms from grammatical and rhetorical theory.

[15] The medieval category of sodomy is not restricted to a narrow range of homoerotic acts,

the grammatical *uitium* [*vice*] of man stands for a greater *uitium* that breaks the chain of divine love uniting man to God and the cosmos. God gave man nature and with it natural law as exemplars, but man obstinately refuses to submit and follow his guides.[16]

However, it is difficult to use this feature of the *De planctu* to read it, as many early critics of the text did, as a straightforward condemnation of sexual deviance.[17] As Alexandre Leupin puts it, 'the text is always on the verge of being submerged in its own enchantment'.[18] This is perhaps even an understatement: the *De planctu* is a text which enthusiastically sets up a governing metaphor for sexual deviance (grammatical and rhetorical excess), while just as enthusiastically inhabiting this excess in its own stylistic intricacy. The dense, self-referential texture of Nature's language can be seen clearly in the passage quoted above and persists throughout the text: most obviously, the language of the quoted passage shows its own reflexivity through the juxtaposition of cognate opposites (for example, *constructionibus* and *destruens*, *conversionibus* and *invertens*, *coloribus* and *decolorans*). Moreover, as David Rollo notes, 'the most sustained of Alain's experiments with these fallen aesthetics is, quite precisely, the passage in which Nature laments the sexual excesses of *falsigraphia* [VIII. 9–10]'.[19] The more emphatic the text's condemnations of sexual deviance, then, the more emphatically it inhabits the stylistic mode which serves throughout the text as a metaphor for that deviance. This practice raises an important question, posed thus by Larry Scanlon: 'If homoerotic desire is to be defined as a troping on the rules of grammar, then how is Alain's grammatical troping finally to be distinguished from it?'.[20]

Of course, the answer is that it cannot. One of the great achievements of the *De planctu* is to show the fundamental queerness of all fallen language, even when grammatically correct according to its own rules. As David Rollo has shown, Nature's use of grammatical metaphor to sanction normative sexuality

as John Boswell shows (*Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, pp. 169–206). See also Rollo, *Kiss my Relics*, p. 82.

[16] Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex*, p. 42.

[17] As, for instance, Green, 'Alan of Lille's *De planctu Naturae*'. For a fuller review of early readings, see Sweeney, *Logic, Theology, and Poetry in Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille*, p. 208 n. 57.

[18] Leupin, *Barbarolexis*, p. 72.

[19] Rollo, *Kiss my Relics*, p. 134; see pp. 98–142 for an extended reading of the complexities of Alan's language.

[20] Scanlon, 'Unspeakable Pleasures', p. 219.

is contradictory.[21] By defining orthographic grammatical 'agreement' as 'naturalem constructionem solummodo masculini femininique generis' (x. 3, 'only the natural relationship of the masculine and feminine genders'), Nature

> contradicts the grammatical conventions of the very language she is speaking. By Nature's definition, Latin, and indeed, any language predicated on gendered termination and agreement, would have to be categorized as homosexual, since it requires the adjective agree with the noun and thereby brings together words of the same gender [...] according to Nature's sexual metaphor, there is no longer such a thing as straight writing.[22]

This fact makes it difficult for us to take the apparent ethical position of the *De planctu* — that sexual deviance and related vices should be condemned — entirely seriously. The text is clearly aware that it is written in a fallen medium (language), or, in fact, more than one: we are told at the end of the text (XVIII. 20) that it was all a dream; specifically, an *insompnium*, a dream categorized by Macrobius as false, 'generated out of the self's recollection of its waking life', and thus having 'no significance beyond the self'.[23] Their differences notwithstanding, readers of *De planctu* have generally assumed that the assertion of a particular (usually orthodox) ethical position is a primary concern of the text, and that it is therefore on some level concerned with sexual regulation.[24] There is, I suggest, a compelling reading of this text in which the regulation of sexual conduct is of secondary significance, serving only as a metaphoric vehicle for the semiotic discourse I see as being the text's principal interest. This might seem at first glance to be a perverse reading. After all, the text's semiotic discourse (its concern with grammar, logic, and language) appears to be the metaphoric vehicle of its discussions of sexual deviance, not the other way around. However, I want to suggest that the text's oneiric framing introduces a further degree of complexity which disables the possibility of interpreting sexual deviance as the final discursive object. *Falsigraphia* undeniably serves as a metaphor for deviant sex, but we can no longer understand deviant sex as being a literal referent when we realize that Nature is speaking in fallen lan-

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[21] Rollo, *Kiss my Relics*, pp. 111–14.

[22] Rollo, *Kiss my Relics*, pp. 112 and 114.

[23] Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 21, paraphrasing Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, I.III.

[24] Even Scanlon argues that the 'transgressive figurations' of the text produce 'orthodoxy', though he denies the presence of an 'orthodox core that resists the play of language' ('Unspeakable Pleasures', p. 222).

guage even as she seeks to regulate orthography, and worse, when we discover
at the end of the text that she is merely a creation of Alan's restless mind, not
a transcendent goddess.[25] Instead, there is a further level of metaphor: deviant
sex, the principal metaphoric tenor of *falsigraphia*, cannot be understood as a
*thing* (in Augustine's definition, as something which does not serve as a sign for
anything else),[26] because not everyone is literally a sodomite. Nature, Alanus,
and indeed, all users of fallen language are guilty of the sins apparently con-
demned in the *De planctu*. If *falsigraphia* signifies sodomy, and all participants
in fallen language are guilty of *falsigraphia*, then sodomy must be taken as a fur-
ther metaphoric vehicle. Sexual deviance must therefore be regarded as a *sign*,
not a thing. As we have seen, what it signifies is the human condition: sin and
fallen signification in toto. Thus understood, the narrow regulatory ambitions
of the *De planctu* are shattered, and we are left with a text which seeks instead
to understand what it means to live in a world of fallen language.

In this interpretation, the *De planctu* is a text stuck in a hermeneutic cir-
cle: the final lines of the text remind us that it is a creation of fallen significa-
tion, which is signified throughout the text by deviant sex as metaphor, but
which also in turn signifies the entire text, including the condemnation of
sexual deviance itself, and so on. In this reading, the *De planctu* emerges as a
text about subjectivity, about the self's attempt to exceed its own bounds by
means of a discourse that is always recognized as failing at the task.[27] In mak-
ing this argument, I diverge from Eileen Sweeney's valuable account of Alan's
literary and theological language: her claim that Alan's allegories appropriate
an Augustinian hermeneutic in order to view the things of the world as signs
of a divine reality (*vestigia Dei*) can only stand, in my view, when we regard
the 'things' of Alan's allegories as substantially existing outside of his imagina-
tion; in other words, to regard them as ontologically distinct from the con-
cepts that they signify.[28] But they are not distinct: they are signs, just like eve-
rything else in the *De planctu*, and the radically deconstructive final words of
Alan's text make it clear that he would have understood them as such. The *De
planctu*, then, is emphatically not a text about ethics, except in the sense that it
implicitly understands that ethical transgression is the human condition, and

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[25] See Rollo, *Kiss my Relics*, p. 104.

[26] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, ed. and trans. by Green, I. iii.

[27] For a reading along similar lines, see Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in
Medieval Literature*, ch. 5. On the circularity of the *De planctu*, see Guynn, *Allegory and Sexual
Ethics*, p. 111, and Leupin, *Barbarolexis*, pp. 74–78.

[28] Sweeney, *Logic, Theology, and Poetry in Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille*, p. 173.

that this transgression affects our ability to access truth.[29] Writers should use all of the tools at their disposal in order to attempt a transcendence of language, even if this transcendence can never be achieved.[30] This is why, as Sweeney has noted, the language of Alan's theological works displays so many of the same stylistic features as the language of his poetic allegories, especially the *De planctu*.[31] To adopt a fitting piece of recent theoretical vocabulary, Alan's writing is a self-consciously 'queer art of failure' which nevertheless aspires, impossibly, to transcend its own frame.[32] The same can be said for the arts (*artes*) of the *trivium* — grammar, logic, and rhetoric — that Alan mines so enthusiastically for the metaphorical vocabulary of his text. As much as these disciplines work to extend the representative capacity of language, the *De planctu* would suggest that they cannot achieve anything but a recursive self-representation: like the text itself, they are queer arts of failure. The central insight of *De planctu*, then, is that signs can never truly signify what theorists working in a Lacanian tradition would call the Real, and what a medieval Christian would call the divine mysteries; the text is, more than anything else, an attempt to perform this impossibility.[33] Lacanian theory provides another useful interpretative key for the text: Nature, as an apparently authoritative figure whose authority is gradually deconstructed by the discourse in which she participates, even as she ostensibly serves to analyse that same discourse, neatly occupies the position of the *sujet supposé savoir*, the apparent possessor of hidden knowledge (a figure embodied by the analyst in the early stages of psychoanalysis).[34] The process

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[29] This is of course not to say that the *De planctu* is incapable of accommodating ethical responses: see Vincent Gillespie's chapter in this volume.

[30] As E. J. Ashworth notes ('Metaphor and the Logicians from Aristotle to Cajetan', p. 319), 'a prominent movement in twelfth-century theology [...] held that all words, with the possible exception of "Qui est", are said *translative* of God. [...] Gilbert of Poitiers and Alan of Lille, to mention just two names, were using *translatio* in a much wider sense than mere metaphor.'

[31] Sweeney, *Logic, Theology, and Poetry in Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille*, p. 157.

[32] Cf. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 2: 'Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world'; and Sweeney, *Logic, Theology, and Poetry in Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille*, p. 175: 'Alan, a good negative theologian, knows neither the words of the poet nor the world can adequately capture the Word. This means Alan's words cannot move toward God in a straight line but must keep spinning around that omnipresent but unlocatable center, abjuring both progress and defeat.'

[33] On the Lacanian Real and *De planctu*, see Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature*, pp. 170–75.

[34] See Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 232.

of the *De planctu* is to reveal that Nature, like the *sujet supposé savoir*, does not in fact possess the knowledge attributed to her at the beginning of the text, and that, in fact, all empirical knowledge of external reality is unattainable: we can only come to know the texture of subjectivity. It might be objected that this reading superimposes an anachronistic theoretical model on the *De planctu*; in other words, that contemporary readers of the *De planctu* did not possess the conceptual framework to accommodate an interpretation of this kind. However, this is not the case; in fact, a key set of problems in the twelfth-century study of logic (also an important field of metaphoric reference in the *De planctu*, and a field with which Alan was clearly familiar) engages with similar questions, and in doing so provides an important set of contexts for understanding the *De planctu*.

In his *Logica 'ingredientibus'*, a long commentary on the corpus of *logica vetus*, Peter Abelard discusses what is signified by a logical proposition, asking what relationship propositions bear to the things (*res*) outside language to which they clearly (in some sense) refer.[35] Abelard argues that 'a true proposition expresses how something is in reality: it does not state the thing itself'.[36] The meaning created by this expression is not a thing, but a *quasi res*: 'not a thing nor an act of thought, though it is the content of such an act [...] something held in the mind and not beyond it'.[37] He thus proposes a philosophical model for language that effects a fundamental separation between words, signification, and things.[38] This radical move, characterized by Brian Stock as an anticipation of Saussurean linguistics, opens up grammar and logic to being considered arts which operate independently from the things of the world.[39] Of course, both disciplines had already drawn a firm distinction between truth and validity from long before the twelfth century: sentences and propositions can clearly be either grammatically correct or logically valid without being true in any externally referential sense. But Abelard disavows language's connection with the world even further. In Eileen Sweeney's words,

[35] Abelard, *Logica 'ingredientibus'*, in *Philosophische Schriften*, ed. by Geyer, 13–22 (pp. 365–70). A useful account of Abelard's discussion is Luscombe, 'Peter Abelard' pp. 285–87.

[36] Luscombe, 'Peter Abelard', p. 285. See also Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*, p. 384.

[37] Luscombe, 'Peter Abelard', p. 285.

[38] See the useful discussion in Sweeney, *Logic, Theology, and Poetry in Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille*, pp. 63–79; and Jolivet, *Arts du langage et théologie chez Abélard*, pp. 72–73 and p. 84.

[39] Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*, p. 385 n. 291.

> Abelard's analysis of language posits a kind of Platonic reality even while he makes it clear that our words and propositions do not capture it; thus he carefully disengages the functioning of words and sentences from things to which or on which they might be supposed to map. For Abelard, even when we achieve knowledge by abstraction, what we have is not knowledge of the 'real' thing. That is a kind of a Platonic reality in the mind of God and in the thing at a level we cannot quite reach. While Boethius recognizes the distinction between the order of things and words, he joins them in principle, positing a point at which the trajectories of word, thought, and thing come together. For Abelard, words, divine and human understanding, sense perceptions, images, and things themselves are simply of different and nontransitive orders.[40]

A related skepticism also inheres in Abelard's theology, as Sweeney shows: for him, theology is 'a science of words' which never succeeds in penetrating the realities in which it must faithfully believe.[41] Thus, we can find in Abelard a series of closely argued philosophical and theological texts which mirror the concerns of the *De planctu*. Alan, whom we know to have studied at Paris and Chartres, would have at least known of Abelard, and may have come to know his work well during his studies.[42]

The affinities between Abelard's logical commentaries and Alan's philosophical fictions are clear. Though these works differ radically in their form, they respond, each in their own way, to the same set of questions. Abelard's concern is to set out his positions using a genre of writing that he has inherited from the writers upon whose works he is commenting; Alan's concern is to construct a world of discourse that responds to these ideas, by allowing them to be played out in narrative in order to explore their difficulties. I want to suggest that the same can be said about Hue de Rotelande's romance *Ipomedon*: like the *De planctu*, *Ipomedon* is a text which responds to philosophical ideas by constructing a discursive realm in which their complexities can be performed. It is important to note that Hue emerged from an institutional context similar to that of both Abelard and Alan: he was a cleric, most likely the product of Hereford cathedral school, an intellectually precocious site of learning in spite of its remote location in the Welsh Marches, and had clearly learned enough to be able to understand Alan's difficult Latin.[43] The substantial differ-

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[40] Sweeney, *Logic, Theology, and Poetry in Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille*, p. 79.

[41] Sweeney, *Logic, Theology, and Poetry in Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille*, p. 94, following Jolivet, *Arts du langage et théologie chez Abélard*, p. 273 n. 157.

[42] Evans, *Alan of Lille*, p. 2.

[43] On Hereford's intellectual credentials, see Burnett, 'Mathematics and Astronomy in

ences between their bodies of writing are obvious: Hue's surviving texts are all
in French, a language in which Alan appears not to have written substantially,
and Hue writes only romances, a mode of writing not generally regarded as
being concerned with philosophy. However, despite these differences, I want
to suggest that Hue's great poetic achievement, the parodic romance *Ipomedon*,
should be read as performing similar cultural and intellectual work to that per-
formed in the *De planctu*.

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In the opening lines of *Ipomedon*, during the course of a prologue larded with
conventional topoi, Hue makes a request for lenience in the matter of his lin-
guistic competence:

> Hue de Rotelande nus dit,
> Ky cest' estorie nous descrit,
> Ky de latin velt romanz fere
> Ne lui deit l'em a mal retrere
> S'il ne poet tuz ses cas garder,
> De tut en tut les tens former;
> Mes pur hastiver la matire
> Nos estovra par biau motz dire;
> Ffors la verrour n'y acrestrai,
> Dirai brefment ceo qe jeo en sai. (ll. 33–42)

[Hue de Rotelande, who recounts this story to us, tells us that one should not criti-
cize someone who wants to make a romance out of Latin if he cannot decline all
of his cases or completely conjugate his tenses — but, to hasten the progress of
the matter, we must speak using beautiful words. I will not exaggerate beyond the
truth; I will briefly say what I know about it.][44]

This modesty topos may make reference to the prologue to the Nun of Barking's
*Vie de Saint Edouard le Confesseur*, in which a similar plea is made.[45] But the
Nun is (of course) actually working from a Latin source in this case, and so her
invocation of the topos makes sense locally: this is clearly not true of *Ipomedon*.

Hereford and its Region'; Hunt, 'English Learning in the Late Twelfth Century'; and Thomas,
*The Secular Clergy in England*, p. 237. Thomas (pp. 44 and 45 n. 41), notes Hue's familiar refer-
ence to Hugh of Hungary (ll. 5520–22), who was a cathedral canon at Hereford.

[44] References to the text are taken from Hue de Rotelande, *Ipomedon*, ed. by Holden;
henceforth referenced by line number in main text. All translations from *Ipomedon* are mine.

[45] See the text and translation in *Vernacular Literary Theory from the French of England*, ed.
and trans. by Wogan-Browne, Fenster, and Russell, p. 21.

Though Hue claims that he is translating a Latin source text, the joke is that there is no such source. In its absence, there is no need for Hue to apologize for his claimed incompetence in Latin grammar. Hue makes a similarly nonsensical claim towards the end of the poem: 'De ceste estoire, ke ai ci faite, | Est cele de Tebes estraite' (ll. 10541–42; the story of Thebes is taken from this story, which I have written here). As before, these lines are a perversion of a recognizable literary topos (in this case, the identification of a work's source), and in both cases, they make use of vernacular-poetic terms of art: *estraire* refers to the process of drawing out a story from its source in an important metapoetic passage in Chrétien's *Cliges*, and *matire* frequently refers to the raw narrative material from which the story is thus extracted.[46] This lexical precision intends, I suggest, to show us that the author knows exactly what he is doing, even as he constructs topoi which manifestly fail to signify felicitously. In other words, these passages mark themselves as having a particular conventional function in the text — expressing conventional modesty, indicating a source — even as they perform their own failure to function in this way. In this sense, they are vestigial topoi, structural features without a structural function. Importantly, they are also manifest transgressions of the rhetorical, logical, and grammatical principles of construction that normatively govern the production of romances.

Examples of this kind could be multiplied extensively. *Ipomedon* frequently occupies itself with the elaboration of non-functional topoi: patterns which conventionally gesture towards a certain meaning, but which fail to do so in the context in which they are employed. The same is true of larger narrative structures in the poem; *Ipomedon* is a long and convoluted text, whose intricacies and extensions are frequently caused by the counterintuitive decisions made by its protagonist. Early in the poem, one of the principal characters, a beautiful princess known only by the name La Fiere ('the proud one'), falls in love with Ipomedon, but she cannot marry him, since she has declared (in accordance with her onomastic identity) that she will marry only the knight with the greatest prowess in feats of arms, and she does not yet know that Ipomedon is the best knight in the world (ll. 129–32). In fact, Ipomedon appears to be a terrible coward (l. 521, 'Par semblant trop cuars esteit'), since he has no interest in any chivalric pursuit apart from hunting (ll. 529–30, 'rivere e bois tant ama, | De autre pruësce unc ne pensa'). No reason is given for this preference: the narrator says that he does not know why (l. 531, 'Jeo ne sei pas pur quei le fist'). The implication is clearly that Ipomedon has the capacity to engage in the full range of chivalric pursuits, but that he refuses to do so for some reason. Having

[46] See Kelly, *The Art of Medieval Romance*, pp. 28 and 30.

discovered that La Fiere will not marry him on account of his apparent lack of prowess, Ipomedon tours Europe, participating in every war that he hears about, and is always the best warrior (ll. 1771–82). But during this time, his real identity was unknown (l. 1783, 'nul ne saveit ki il fu'), thus compromising the structural function of this 'display' of chivalry. Ipomedon is given a similar opportunity to demonstrate his prowess when La Fiere, who has been urged by her advisors to choose a husband, agrees to hold a three-day tournament whose victor will be able to claim her hand in marriage (ll. 2550–54). The tournament is set with a delay of four months (l. 2568). In the intervening time, Ipomedon offers his service to Meleager, king of Sicily and uncle of La Fiere, in exchange for being offered the position of the queen's 'dru' (beloved one), which entails the privilege of acting as the queen's escort as she goes to and from her chambers, and of receiving a kiss from her as a reward for his services (l. 3019). This episode is another non-functional topos: it makes reference to Lancelot's love-service of Guinevere in Chretien's *Lancelot*, but if this is indeed the situation that we are supposed to recall when we encounter the *dru* episode, then we are hardly rewarded with a reference that sheds light on the intersubjective dynamics of the narrative.[47] After all, the queen is not Ipomedon's true love-object, as Guinevere is for Lancelot. Instead, the topos serves to highlight the impossibility of progress at this point in the narrative: Ipomedon must wait until the tournament to prove himself, and he has nothing else to do in the intervening time, since he is already the best knight in the world — all he can do (in the implicit conceit of the text) is mark time by enacting generic topoi for the sake of enacting them. When the tournament arrives, Ipomedon feigns a lack of interest in the event (ll. 3177–80). He leads the court to believe that he plans to go hunting on each of the three days; instead, he competes incognito, adopting a series of disguises, and attains victory on each of the three days, each time in a different disguise. Ipomedon eventually reveals himself to be the victor, but departs without claiming the hand of La Fiere (ll. 7203–04), an act which (we must assume) would bring the text to its conclusion. He has a further opportunity to proceed to the narrative stasis engendered by marriage when a pagan giant called Leonin attempts to abduct La Fiere, but even this does not proceed as expected. Having defeated Leonin in single combat, Ipomedon proceeds with a 'strange deed' (l. 9919, 'estrange ovre'): he disguises himself in his vanquished adversary's armour and pretends that Leonin was the victor. As Robert Hanning notes of this section of the poem, 'the story

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[47] See West, *Courtoisie in Anglo-Norman Literature*, p. 88.

seems destined to continue indefinitely'.[48] It is only brought to a close by the intervention of another knight, Capaneus, who, upon defeating the disguised Ipomedon, notices a ring on the vanquished knight's finger that identifies them as half-brothers (ll. 10205–87).[49] Ipomedon and La Fiere are reunited, and the dynastic and sexual unions that the poem has so compulsively deferred are finally allowed to take place (ll. 10500–40).

At this point, it is worth comparing *Ipomedon*'s distinctive narrative practice with one of the central discourses of Alan's *De planctu*, namely, the distinction between normative, generative reproduction and non-generative, sodomitical troping. Certain kinds of grammatical, logical, and rhetorical arrangement generate things beyond themselves, whereas other kinds generate only themselves, or what Jonathan Morton has described as 'a queer infinity [...] eternal, senseless repetition'.[50] As we have seen, the *De planctu* shows that all fallen language is *falsigraphia*. Fallen language is therefore a tool which can never hope to produce knowledge of an external reality, but it can instead generate valuable knowledge of the always-already deviant self. I want to suggest that *Ipomedon*, like *De planctu*, demonstrates the presence of an immanent, unavoidable deviance in fallen language, and (again, like *De planctu*) that it makes use of *falsigraphia* to generate a form of self-knowledge — in this case, romance's own textual/generic self-knowledge, a knowledge which serves to demonstrate the falsity of romance's constant implicit self-identification as a vehicle of truth.

In the story that Hue develops, any 'orthographical' (i.e. not falsigraphic) arrangement of tropes would cause the text to move towards its conclusion prematurely.[51] If Ipomedon had publicly demonstrated the prowess of which he is capable, La Fiere's conditions would have been fulfilled, and Ipomedon and his love-object would have been united almost immediately, leaving a romance bereft of incident and, therefore, interest. The form of *Ipomedon* thus depends on sodomitical troping as a basic condition of its existence. By deferring its own ending through *falsigraphia*, the poem marks itself as taking place in the fallen semiotic realm of *De planctu*, in which the structurally functional art has been replaced by sterile troping. In the conceit of the poem, heterosexual union is not a generative force, but an annihilating one, inimical to the continuation

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[48] Hanning, 'Engin in Twelfth-Century Romance', p. 94.

[49] Capaneus is mentioned as an exemplar of physical strength in Alan of Lille, *De planctu*, in *Literary Works*, ed. and trans. by Wetherbee, xviii. 8. For the presumed source of this name for both Hue and Alan, see Statius, *Thebaid*, iv. 166.

[50] Morton, 'Queer Metaphors and Queerer Reproduction', p. 209.

[51] Cf. Francesca Southerden's discussion of the poetics of wandering in this volume.

of the narrative and, by extension, the continuation of all romance narratives targeted by the parody. *Ipomedon* thus enacts what we might call a sodomitical poetics: one which recognizes, on the one hand, the inability of sterile troping to generate anything beyond itself (that is, to access any external truth), and on the other hand, the absolute necessity of this kind of writing — perhaps especially in the case of romance — and its infinite capacity for generating pleasure and discourse. In Hue's reading, the literary mode of romance is a machine which seeks to perpetuate itself by introducing unnecessary (that is, excessive, sodomitical, falsigraphic) obstacles in the path of its protagonists, who are never actually tested by the trials that they face, because they are always the best knights in the narrative universes created to house them. Like *De planctu*, *Ipomedon* recognizes the perverse, self-referential fecundity of troping by showing that no romance could exist without recourse to sodomitical *amplificatio*, and furthermore, that this same unavoidable tendency towards self-reproduction can reflexively generate knowledge of the texture, and perhaps even the nature, of romance, when identified and deconstructed by means of parody.

Neatly enough, the conclusions of nearly all romances of this kind (*Ipomedon* included) are marked by marriage (in other words, normative heterosexual union). The self-perpetuating model of romance, then, is not only structurally (that is, metaphorically) sodomitical by virtue of its tendency to engage in what *De planctu* would call the vice of excessive troping; it is also in a sense literally sodomitical, because it rejects the normative sexuality of the narrative ending that it compulsively avoids. This is a particularly resonant idea for *Ipomedon* because the text does not end immediately after its graphic description of the protagonists' sexual union (one which, we might note, firmly emphasizes pleasure over reproductive potential).[52] Instead, we are given a substantial epilogue, the source of the intertextual reference to the epilogue of the *De planctu*, in which Hue performs a gleeful assertion of the perversely generative sexual power of the author, one which overrides the text's previous (apparent) celebration of heterosexual union.

The two epilogues require direct comparison. In *De planctu*, Nature decides to summon Genius, her priest, in order that he might excommunicate those who persist in deviant falsigraphy. Genius dresses himself in clerical vestments and delivers a speech of excommunication:

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[52] 'Chescun de cez ad ben gardé | A autre sa virginité, | Or se entreaiment tant par amur | Ke il se entrefoutent tute jur' (ll. 10513–16: Each one of them had kept their virginity well for the other — now they love each other so much that they fuck each other constantly).

Tunc Genius post vulgaris vestimenti depositionem sacerdotalis indumenti ornamentis celebrioribus honestius infulatus, sub hac verborum imagine praetaxatam excommunicationis seriem a penetralibus mentis forinsecus evocavit, hoc locutionis procedens curriculo: 'Auctoritate superessentialis Usyae eiusquae Notionis eternae, assensu caelestis militiae, coniunctae Naturae etiam ceteraumque offcialium virtutum ministerio suffragante, a supernae dilectionis osculo separetur, ingratitudinis exigente merito, a Naturae gratia degradetur, a naturalium rerum uniformi concilio segregetur omnis qui aut legitimum Veneris obliquat incessum, aut gulositatis naufragium aut ebrietatis sentit insomnium, aut avaritiae sitientis experitur incendium, aut insolentis arrogantiae umbratile ascendit fastigium, aut praecordiale patitur livoris exitium, aut adulationis amorem comitatur ficticium. Qui a regula Veneris exceptionem facit anomalam Venerit privetur sigillo. Qui gulositatis mergitur in abisso mendicitatis erubescentia castigetur. Qui ebrietatis letaeo flumine soporatur perpetuatae sitis vexetur incendiis. Ille in quo sitis incandescit habendi perpetuatas paupertatis egestates incurrat. Qui in praecipitio arrogantiae exaltatus spiritum elationis eructat, in vallem deiectae humilitatis ruinose descendat. Qui alienae felicitatis divitias tinea detractionis invidendo demordet, primo se sibi hostem inveniat. Qui adulationis ypocrisi a divitibus venatur munuscula, sophistici meriti fraudetur in praemio.' (XVIII. 16–18)

[Then Genius, after laying aside his common garments, and robed with more dignity in the honourable adornment of his priestly vestments, summoned forth from the inner chambers of his mind the promised speech of excommunication, following this course as he spoke: 'By the authority of the superessential Being and his eternal Idea; with the assent of the heavenly host, and the approval of the government of my partner Nature and her attendant Virtues: let all those be denied the kiss of heavenly love who obstruct the lawful channel of Venus; who undergo the shipwreck of gluttony or the nightmare of drunkenness; who know the heat of thirsting avarice, scale the illusory heights of insolent arrogance, suffer the ravaging of envy deep within, become familiar with the feigning love of flattery. As the necessary reward for their ingratitude, let them be declared unworthy of the grace of Nature, banished from the united community of the natural order. May he who pursues irregular exceptions to the rule of Venus be deprived of the seal of Venus. May he who is immersed in the abyss of gluttony be punished by the humiliation of beggary. May he who is drenched in the Lethean flood of drunkenness be tormented by the fires of perpetual thirst. May he who burns with the thirst for possession incur the endless wants of poverty. May he who is set high on the precipice of arrogance and puffs forth his prideful spirit undergo a ruinous fall into the valley of downcast humbleness. May he who gnaws enviously with the worm of slander at the wealth of one more fortunate discover that he is first an enemy to himself. Let him who pursues gifts from rich men through hypocritical flattery be deceived by a prize of deceptive worth.']

The 'seal of Venus' is the power of reproduction in the abstract, but also refers to the testicles as reproductive organs, as part of a broad metaphor-complex in *De planctu* that describes sexual reproduction using the lexis of artifice and craftsmanship.[53] The anathema, importantly, is self-authoring: those who reject normative sexuality will be excepted from the 'rule of Venus' (that is, normative heterosexuality) by being deprived of its seal; those who make themselves constant beggars by means of the constant desire of gluttony will be allowed to be the beggars that they already are; drunkards, who always need more to drink, will be allowed to be eternally thirsty, and so on. In other words, deviant sexuality is both crime and punishment. But, as Larry Scanlon has noted, Alan is not here suggesting that those guilty of the transgressions he describes should be literally excommunicated, a practice whose historical application differed widely from that suggested here: in his interpretation, the passage 'reads Church procedure into the natural world, and makes the structure of clerical authority exactly mirror the structure of creation. [...] Biological fact becomes moral result'.[54] By contrast, I suggest that this feature of the text lends further support to the interpretation advanced above, by standing as a further reminder that no act of signification in the text is uncomplicated: the 'excommunication' described in the text does not map on to the twelfth-century Catholic ritual in any sense, but rather signifies, as we have seen, that our (unavoidable) adoption of fallen language excommunicates us from the external world in its entirety. This reading equally resolves a somewhat unsatisfying implication; namely, that practitioners of sodomy are somehow tormented by the fact that it does not lead to reproduction. As Scanlon himself notes, it is difficult to imagine that the act of sodomy is being presented here as containing an inherent punishment, since the redemptive structure of Christianity requires that the punishment for sin be postponed until after death.[55] We must therefore regard this passage instead as being in the service of a broader reflexivity in *De planctu*: sin is its own punishment because everything in the text is not only self-referential, but self-identical as well; metaphoric tenor and vehicle collapse into one another as the text's claims to refer to an external reality are shown to be unsupportable.

It will be immediately clear that the epilogue to *Ipomedon* bears many similarities to the passage from *De planctu* quoted above:

[53]  See Scanlon, 'Unspeakable Pleasures', p. 241.

[54]  Scanlon, 'Unspeakable Pleasures', pp. 239 and 241.

[55]  Scanlon, 'Unspeakable Pleasures', p. 242.

Ipomedon a tuz amanz
Mande saluz en cest romanz
Par cest Hue de Rotelande;
De part le deu d'amur cumande
Des or mes lealment amer,
Sens tricherie e senz fauser;
E se nuls de amer se retrait
Devant ço ke il ait sun bon fait,
Enfin cil ert escumengé,
E puis si ait plener cungé
De enveisir la u il purra,
Asouz ert cil ki plus avra.
A Credehulle a ma meisun
Chartre ai de l'absoluciun;
Se il ad dame u pucele
U riche vedve u dameisele
Ne voille creire ke jo l'ai
Venge la, jo li musterai;
Ainz ke d'iloc s'en seit turné
La chartre li ert enbrevé,
E ço n'ert pas trop grant damages
Se li seaus li pent as nages. (ll. 10559–80)

[Ipomedon sends greetings to all lovers in this romance through Hue de Rotelande; he commands them on behalf of the God of Love to love faithfully from now on. And if anyone abandons love before he has had his way, he will be excommunicated in the end. And then may he have full permission to amuse himself where he can; the one who has the most will be absolved. At my house in Credenhill I have a charter of absolution. If there is a lady or a maiden, a rich widow or a damsel who is not willing to believe that I have it, may she come here: I will show it to her. Before she has returned from that place, the charter will be signed for her, and it will not be too great a detriment if the seal hangs down to her arse-cheeks.]

In both texts, we find an authoritative voice, appointed by a still higher authority, whose threat of excommunication attempts to regulate sexual conduct. And of course, the texts share a similar metaphor in which seals signify the testicles. These similarities form the core of Eley's argument for *Ipomedon*'s dependence on *De planctu*, and indeed, are sufficient in themselves to demonstrate intertextual reference.[56] However, the similarities alone do not establish what ideas might be communicated by this reference; we must ask what the substantial

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[56] Eley, 'Sex and Writing', pp. 95–96.

differences between the two scenes can tell us about *Ipomedon*'s response (and it is, I would suggest, a response, rather than a reference) to *De planctu*.

In *De planctu*, God appoints Nature as his regent, who in turn appoints Genius as her priest. *Ipomedon*'s hierarchy makes much less sense: an authorial voice speaks on behalf of Ipomedon who, despite being Hue's textual creation, is higher than him in this hierarchy of being. This decision is reminiscent of Hue's insistence, quoted earlier in the essay, that his story is the source for the Theban cycle (ll. 10541–42): both examples may perhaps embody gleeful performances of a reversal comparable to the disregard for the normative order of subject and predicate lamented by Nature in *De planctu* VIII. 11.[57]

Moreover, this section of *Ipomedon* presents a universe presided over by the God of Love, instead of simply God, who is the unseen figure at the top of every hierarchy in *De planctu*. The implication appears to be that we are in a universe governed by the rule of sexual love, not the rule of God's love: in this section, the authorial voice speaks directly to the inscribed audience and gives what is, formally speaking at least, direct ethical instruction. The implication of the God of Love's presence at the top of Hue's hierarchy is immediately followed up: the text makes clear that Hue's anathema (unlike that of Genius) does not forbid particular forms of behaviour, but rather the insufficiently passionate practice of a universal desire (love). The ostensibly normative sexual ethics of Genius's anathema are replaced by a command which does not appear to distinguish between permissible and impermissible forms of love.

Of course, the anathema of the *De planctu*, as we have seen, is far from straight-faced.[58] However, the text is clearly concerned, perhaps even troubled by, the necessary failure of all signification. As I have argued above, the *De planctu* attempts to transcend its frame, even as it performs the radical impossibility of that task. At this point, I want to suggest that *Ipomedon*'s closing lines offer a differing account of the relationship between generative sex, pleasure, and writing, one which stages an even more fundamental abandonment of the link between signs and things than that offered in *De planctu*.

In *Ipomedon*, the sentence of excommunication frees lovers to pursue sexual amusement where they can, and commands them to do so to the greatest degree possible, in the hope of absolution by means of Hue's sealed charter,

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[57] 'Sunt qui, in Veneris logica disputantes, in conclusionibus suis subiectionis praedicationisque legem relatione mutua sortiuntur' ('Others, disputing in the logic of Venus, render arbitrary in their conclusions the law that governs the mutual relationship of subject and predicate').

[58] See Morton, 'Queer Metaphors and Queerer Reproduction', for a fuller account of the 'queerness' of the language of the *De planctu* than I am able to give here.

identified as a figurative stand-in for his genitals in the closing lines.[59] Hue's crude assertion of heterosexual (though perhaps still sodomitical) desire in the closing lines easily obscures the implicit suggestion that his 'charter' will also be used to 'absolve' a generalized lover identified a number of times using the male pronoun ('il', l. 10566, and so on). Hue thus reminds us that, through writing, he is fulfilling the desires of his audience for a particular kind of discourse, and hence a particular kind of pleasure — and as the rest of the text has shown, the distinctive form of this discourse is *falsigraphia*. Hue goes further than *De planctu*, then, in his eagerness to identify all writing as concerned with deviant pleasure: deviant, that is, because it resists satisfaction, progress, and generation of difference. And as we have seen, in Hue's remarkable claim that those who have been 'escumengé' may amuse themselves wherever they can, deviant pleasure is the result of, rather than the cause of, excommunication in *Ipomedon*. What Hue is suggesting, I think, is that an acknowledgement of the fundamental separateness of language and reality allows writing to emerge as a space of genuine play, one which has abandoned its hope of expressing any kind of external reality, and one which can therefore concern itself with the real business of generating pleasure, instead of meaning. Hue's implicit criticism of *De planctu*, then, is that it does not go far enough — that it still hopes to find some meaning in a discourse whose process disables that very possibility. Romance, as a literary mode that is more directly concerned than philosophical fiction with the generation of pleasure, is powerfully suited to generating these kinds of conclusions. We might finally suggest, then, that Hue is attempting to present his parodic romance as a more suitable medium for the 'philosophical' exploration of desire and pleasure than Alan's philosophical fiction, which can never fully abandon its hopeless search for knowledge, as a thought experiment of what philosophy without meaning might look like. Courtly romance has been famously described as a 'quest for truth',[60] but perhaps *Ipomedon*, in its parodic deconstruction of the mode, serves to reveal that it is better described as a quest for pleasure, and that it is, paradoxically, at its truest when it pursues pleasure wholeheartedly.

[59] A similar textual metaphor for the male genitals, which may have informed Hue here, can be found in Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars versificatoria*, written *c.* 1175. This text discusses a figure of stylistic vice, Davus, whose errors of scansion are described as a dactylic penis which goes where it shouldn't, the long syllable first followed by two shorter ones. See *Ars versificatoria*, ed. by Munari, I. liii; and for the likely date, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, p. 559.

[60] Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance*, p. 211; Köhler, *Ideal und Wirklichkeit in der höfischen Epik*, p. 51.

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# *Ethice Subponitur*?
# The Imaginative Syllogism
# and the Idea of the Poetic

Vincent Gillespie

What did medieval literary theorists think happened when they read or heard poetry? Between 1150 and 1450 increasing numbers of commentators showed a heightened interest in the *effects* of reading poetry on its audience.[1] This interest was not just in the ways those effects were created, but also increasingly in the impact that poetic effects had on the affections, imagination, and understanding of readers and listeners. More than any other medieval mode of discourse, the Poetic required its audience to perform thought experiments. The study of philosophy was habitually divided into logical, physical, and ethical branches. When applied to literary texts the standard question 'to which part of philosophy does it pertain?' found in introductions or *accessus* invariably produced the answer 'Ethice subponitur' ('it pertains to or supports ethics') in medieval commentaries. This is because, as Conrad of Hirsau instructs in his grammar school *accessus* to Cato, 'Breviter igitur in omnibus auctoribus esse finalem fructum istum ["correctione morum"] intellige, si legentem aversione vitiorum et appetitu ex ipsa lectione virtutum constiterit proficere' (Understand this [the correction of habits] in brief as the final

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fruit in all authors, if reading them may give the reader an aversion to vice and an appetite for virtue).[2] Literary texts are thus studied under two distinct but interrelated disciplines: insofar as the mechanics of signification and the disciplines of writing follow certain conventions, literature falls under the aegis of logic. But, according to the conventions of the day, what authors actually say falls under the gaze of ethics, because the precepts of the text must be tested by their audiences against the principles of ethical philosophy:

> To define ethics in medieval terms is to define poetry, and to define poetry is to define ethics, because medieval ethics was so much under the influence of the literary paideia as to be enacted poetry.[3]

So far, so conventional. Indeed most of the preceding paragraph comes from one of my own previous publications.[4] But is any of it true? I'm increasingly doubtful that these labels tell us anything helpful about medieval thinking about the distinctive cognitive impacts of the Poetic as a discursive mode. It may well be true of Cato, Avianus, and the other grammar school reading texts from the early stages of the school curriculum. It is precisely in commentaries on these primer texts that the *ethice subponitur* label is usually found.[5] But many poetic theorists, following Aristotle, would have argued that such texts occupied a particular discursive and didactic category that was only minimally Poetic in the true philosophical sense of that concept. So extending this highly pragmatic ethical category to all poetry quickly looks unsustainable, considering how indirect and imaginatively challenging much poetry could become. Morality is never a first-order response to the genuinely Poetic, and texts that

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[2] Conrad of Hirsau, *Dialogus super auctores*, ed. by Huygens, p. 83. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. I am deeply indebted to Charles Roe for his invaluable assistance in the preparation of this article for publication, and for his assistance with translations.

[3] Allen, The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages, p. 12. Allen's lifelong interest in these materials is also seen in his *The Friar as Critic*.

[4] Gillespie, 'From the Twelfth Century to *c.* 1450', pp. 147, 161. For many of the issues raised in this paper, see the discussion there and the lengthy bibliography on pp. 722–47. For reasons of space, in these notes I will privilege important work that has appeared since that volume.

[5] For texts, see Huygens, *Accessus ad Auctores*; for translations, see *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Minnis and Scott, and Elliott, '*Accessus ad Auctores*'; for discussion and further bibliography, see Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*. For recent work, consult Ruys, Ward, and Heyworth, *The Classics in the Medieval and Renaissance Classroom*. It is arguable that these grammar school primers have exerted too much influence on our understanding of medieval metapoetic and poetic theory.

produce easily programmatic and schematic moral responses cannot, therefore, be categorized as Poetic in the core philosophical or metapoetic sense of the term. As the old adage has it, if you get a simple answer you must be asking the wrong question. Because whereas moral teaching might be viewed as didaxis, requiring assent and approval from its audience, ethics was always a praxis, called into being by the active engagement of the reader in the process of navigating complexity and choice, either in real life or in the fictional landscape of an imaginative text. The Poetic requires its audience to see things from its own unique perspective, demands that they put its irreducible vision of Things As They Are as if before their own eyes. The *quasi*/as if, signalling the metaphoricity of the genuinely Poetic imaginative act, is every bit as important in poetic vision as it is in contemplative vision.[6]

The Poetic always resists the pull of the banal and the programmatic. The Poetic transports the audience by verbal, generic, and structural metaphor to an unfamiliar imaginative landscape and requires them to navigate it and to map it as best they can by using all the human skills at their disposal. But the geography of that landscape is always triumphantly and aggressively inviolate and inexhaustible, always ready and willing to be recrossed and re-explored in different directions by another reader. The Poetic does not predicate a particular response to or analysis of its metaphorical landscapes of action and characterization. That function lies with the second-order ethical appropriation and application of the Poetic by its audience. The desire for such active reading lies behind Chaucer's repeated exhortations to his readers to *assay* his texts and read with *avisement*, but Chaucer is unusually alert to the fact that all reading is a highly individualistic and indeed subjective process, one that the structure of the *Canterbury Tales* seeks to dramatize and explore. The protheme of the Parson's Tale, from the prophet Jeremiah, identifies ethical questing as a key feature of the reading process:

> Stondeth upon the weyes and seeth and axeth of olde pathes (that is to seyn of olde sentences) which is the goode wey, and walketh in that wey and ye shall fynde refresshynge for youre soules &c.[7]

The reader faced with a multiplicity of ways has to see and ask. The paths do not come already signposted. This is emphatically true of Chaucer, but it is also true of Langland, the Gawain poet, much of Dante, and most of the French

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[6] Newman, 'What Did It Mean to Say "I Saw"?'; Newman, *Medieval Crossover*.

[7] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Benson, X (I), ll. 76–77 (p. 288).

dream-poem tradition. And it is triumphantly true of Ovid, the classical author who taught most of them how to do slippery narrative voices.[8]

In the Arabic traditions of reading Aristotle that greatly influenced Western thought in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it was agreed that poetry constituted a special branch of logic, which possessed rules and procedures that were different from those addressed in the study of Rhetoric.[9] Al-Farabi's tenth-century listing of the constituent parts of Aristotle's logical corpus — the *Organon* — soon became widely accepted in the new university schools.[10] In the *Organon*, the *Rhetoric* was the eighth book and the *Poetics* the ninth and last. Poetry's place as the last and lowest form of logic provided a convenient schema within which its distinctive features could be discerned and defined. While Rhetoric inclines the hearer to acquiesce in what is being said and to persuade him of its credibility, poetic discourse, it was argued, works by appealing to the imagination to produce an emotional response. The appeal to the imagination by means of metaphorical language and situational similitude is, therefore, what distinguishes the Poetic from Rhetoric. Poetry generates an image that provokes an instant and unpremeditated response from the estimative faculty by the force of its impact on the affections of its audience. This affective response is more potent than rhetorical argument or demonstration because it involves the psyche of the audience in an active simulation of the processes of immediate apprehension and of subsequent ethical choice and assessment found in real life. Hermann the German (Hermannus Alemannus) cites Al-Farabi as saying that 'cum indigeat rethorica poetria, illa vero non indigeat rethorica' ('rhetoric needs poetics but poetics does not need rhetoric').[11]

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[8] See Gillespie, 'From the Twelfth Century to *c*. 1450', pp. 186–206 and associated bibliography. More recently, see Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling*; Hexter and Townsend, *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature*; Clark, Coulson, and McKinley, *Ovid in the Middle Ages*; Keith and Rupp, *Metamorphosis*; Copeland, *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*, vol. I: *800–1558*.

[9] Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*; Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*; Black, 'Imagination and Estimation'.

[10] On the impact of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, see Copeland, 'Pathos and Pastoralism'. I am arguing for greater discrimination between the categories of Rhetoric and Poetic. Imagination is central to Aristotle's discussions in *De anima*, and the medieval commentaries on this text also contribute to thinking about the role of the imaginative syllogism. Space does not allow for consideration of them, but see Minnis, 'Medieval Imagination and Memory' for basic orientation. See also Copeland, '*Affectio* in the Tradition of the *De Inventione*' and the other essays in Donovin and Stodola, *Public Declamations*.

[11] Hermannus Alemannus, *Didascalia in Rhetoricam Aristotelis ex glosa Alpharabi*, ed. by

Avicenna (980–1037), in his shorter commentary on the *Poetics*, carefully distinguishes between assent (the end of Rhetoric) and imagination (the end of Poetic):

> Poetic premises are premises whose role is to cause acts of imagination, and not assent, to befall the soul, whenever they are accepted. And the production of imagination is the arousal of wonder, aggrandizement, downplaying or belittlement, grief or delight, without the purpose of what is said being to establish conviction at all. And it is not one of the conditions of these premises that they be true or false, or widely accepted or repugnant, but rather that they be imaginative.[12]

Indeed both Al-Farabi and Avicenna describe the premises of a poetic syllogism as 'productive of imagining'.[13] The way the soul reacts to poetic stimuli is imaginative rather than deliberative: one of the distinctive features of the Poetic is that it produces a response that is unexpected and 'without deliberation' (we will see Roger Bacon making the same argument later).[14] Aphoristically, Al-Farabi condenses his view as follows: 'Imagination is to poetics like knowledge is to demonstration, opinion to dialectics, and persuasion to rhetoric'.[15] In his *De scientiis*, he distinguishes between *sermones rhetorici*, which produce acquiescence and belief, and *sermones poetici*, which produce acts of imagination. This distinction between Poetic and Rhetoric is crucial: for Avicenna it is between imagination (for which read the Poetic) and assent (for which read Rhetoric). Both produce what he calls 'acquiescence' in the audience, but the modalities are strikingly different:

> Imagination is a [form of] acquiescence, and assent is also a [form of] acquiescence; but imagination is an acquiescence to the wonder and delight of the utterance itself, whereas assent is an acquiescence to accept that the thing is as it is said to be.[16]

The kinds of response that the Poetic generates are different in kind from those produced by a deliberative assent to a proposition or an argument such as might be generated by the persuasive words of forensic rhetoric. Avicenna asserts that

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Langhade and Grignaschi, p. 213; trans. in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, p. 751.

[12] Trans. by Black in 'The "Imaginative Syllogism" in Arabic Philosophy', p. 245.

[13] Trans. by Black in 'The "Imaginative Syllogism" in Arabic Philosophy', p. 253.

[14] Trans. by Black in 'The "Imaginative Syllogism" in Arabic Philosophy', p. 246.

[15] Trans. by Black in 'The "Imaginative Syllogism" in Arabic Philosophy', p. 255.

[16] Trans. by Black in 'The "Imaginative Syllogism" in Arabic Philosophy', p. 246.

'the means of persuasion mentioned in the *Rhetoric* are not proper to poetry'.[17] Al-Farabi, for example, argues the following:

> Excellence in producing an imaginative expression is not excellence of persuasion. The difference between them is that excellence of persuasion aims at the hearer doing something after assenting to it, while excellence in producing an imaginative expression aims at the soul of the hearer rising up to seek the thing imagined or to flee from it, and be drawn to or dislike it, even without assent to it having occurred.[18]

Seeking and fleeing, liking and disliking are later responses of the audience, not extrinsic or intrinsic agendas of the poetic text. The text does not require any of them, nor does it prescribe how or when a reader should respond. The imaginative acquiescence to the poetic syllogism is ultimately self-referential and lacking any explicit or implicit ethical agenda. Imagination rather than morality is the end of poetry, and Avicenna's view of poetry seems morally neutral:

> In poetical syllogisms, you only heed things that are imaginative. They may be true or false on the whole, or not on the whole, so long as the soul is aroused by them towards shrinking from or delighting in something, not because of assenting to something within them, but rather on account of a motion productive of an imagining which befalls the soul along with them. [...] Frequently [imagination] will induce an effect without producing assent. And sometimes it may be that the thing whose falsehood has been ascertained is productive of an imagining.[19]

Rather than persuasion or deliberation, Al-Farabi argues that poetry overtakes the rational by the force of its imaginative stimuli: 'imagination taking the place of deliberation'.[20]

Such formulations continued to exert a gravitational pull on thinking about poetry, even when Western scholars started to engage more directly with the texts of Aristotle. This radical Arabic inflection of Aristotle's ideas on the Poetic order lies behind Dominicus Gundissalinus's definition of the purpose of poetry in his *De divisione philosophiae* (post-1150, but often attributed in manuscripts to the early thirteenth-century Oxford scholar Robert Grosseteste), which follows Al-Farabi very closely:

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[17] Avicenna, *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. by Dahiyat, p. 95.

[18] Trans. by Black in 'The "Imaginative Syllogism" in Arabic Philosophy', p. 254.

[19] Trans. by Black in 'The "Imaginative Syllogism" in Arabic Philosophy', p. 253 n. 26.

[20] Trans. by Black in 'The "Imaginative Syllogism" in Arabic Philosophy', p. 263.

Proprium est poeticae sermonibus suis facere imagineri aliquid pulchrum vel foedum, quod non est, ita ut auditor credat et aliquando abhorreat uel appetat. [...] Imaginacio enim quandoque plus operatur in homine quam scientia vel cogitatio.[21]

[The proper function of poetic words is to make us imagine beautiful or foul things which are not real, so that the hearer may believe in them and finally abhor or desire them. [...] Imagination is always more powerfully at work in mankind than knowledge or thought.]

Hermann the German's Latin version of the *Poetics* (made in Spain, *c.* 1256) was in fact a translation from the Arabic of Averroes's (twelfth-century) Middle Commentary on the *Poetics* of Aristotle.[22] Averroes, as we know from Borges's wonderful story in his collection *Labyrinths*, was unaware that Aristotle's primary focus in the *Poetics* was tragedy and comedy as dramatic genres, and had interpreted his teaching as applying to various forms of lyric, elegiac, and panegyric poetry, using Arabic examples to illustrate.[23] This emphasis was carried over by Hermann's translation, giving rise to the medieval commonplace that all poetry was either praise or blame (*laudatio vel vituperatio*), though it is crucial to remember that in the more abstract considerations of the Poetic as a category of discourse, praise or blame is an *ex post facto* ethical judgement arrived at by the audience provoked by the imaginative stimuli of the text rather than a conclusion always already encoded in the text.

It is worth looking carefully at the lexical choices that Hermann makes in his rendering of Averroes, as they undoubtedly influenced the ways in which these ideas about the nature of the Poetic were received by later readers and commentators, especially in the gobbetized circulation of many of the ideas as isolated aphorisms and commonplaces. Whereas Averroes had commented that 'poetic statements are imitative', Hermann tightens and focuses this into the assertion that 'sermones poetici sermones sunt ymaginativi' (poetic words are

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[21] Dominicus Gundissalinus, *De divisione philosophiae*, ed. by Fidora and Werner, p. 156 (in the chapter *De logica*).

[22] See Hardison, 'The Place of Averroes' Commentary on the *Poetics*'; Allen, 'Hermann the German's Averroistic Aristotle'; Kelly, 'Aristotle – Averroes – Alemannus on Tragedy'; Boggess, 'Aristotle's *Poetics* in the Fourteenth Century'; Boggess, 'Hermannus Alemannus and Catharsis in the Medieval Latin *Poetics*'; Tigerstedt, 'Observations on the Reception of the Aristotelian *Poetics*'. See also the discussion and translations in Hermannus Alemannus, 'Translation of Averroes' "Middle Commentary"', ed. by Minnis and Scott.

[23] Borges, 'Averroes' Search'.

imaginative words).[24] What he means by this is only gradually and indirectly expounded. Aristotle says that the tragic poet, presenting individually characterized people in specific circumstances, makes us aware of social and ethical facts and possibilities relevant to more than the situation he envisages. These facts and situations may be unfamiliar to the audience, but they must be imaginatively accessible. *Mimesis* in the *Poetics* is a means of acquiring knowledge not otherwise available, by engaging in a process of 'likening'. In Hermann this key term is rendered as *imaginatio* or *assimilatio*. Because Aristotle had stated that man naturally delights in representations, the process of what the Latin *Poetics* call poetic *assimilatio* ('likening') can produce pleasure, 'recipit ergo anima perfectius proposita secundum delectationem sui quam habet in exemplis' ('for the mind/soul will more perfectly assimilate teachings as a result of the pleasure which it takes in examples').[25] This is because the nature of the 'imaginative likening' constructed by the genuinely Poetic text creates an imaginative and metaphorical landscape that allows the audience to test or assay that imaginative landscape, to make comparisons, to generate similitudes, and to validate it against their own knowledge and experience of real life: this is a key element in the distinctive power of poetic discourse. Hermann argues that from birth man has the ability and the instinct to compare things to each other and to compare the representation of things to the things themselves. Art must imitate nature, even if the events and images presented are not in fact objectively 'true' in any forensic sense.

But the process of *assimilatio* is a kind of thought experiment whereby the reader or hearer instinctively responds to the imaginative stimuli of the text and then compares and likens the imaginative representation first to their own knowledge of the world and, eventually and subsequently, to their own encoded ethical values. The need for credibility (*credulitas* in Averroistic terms) is a function of the status of Poetic as a stimulus to the imagination of the audience, producing an initial apprehension of the terms of the narrative metaphoricity, and leading subsequently to an ordered assessment and analysis (*consideratio*).

The kind of large-scale narrative metaphoricity that generates an imaginative syllogism operates in a world of pure and self-policing 'as if'. In two places

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[24] Averroes, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. by Butterworth, p. 60; Hermannus Alemannus, *De arte poetica*, ed. by Minio-Paluello, p. 42. See also Hermannus Alemannus, 'Translation of Averroes' "Middle Commentary"', ed. by Minnis and Scott, pp. 282–83.

[25] Hermannus Alemannus, *De arte poetica*, ed. by Minio-Paluello, p. 45; trans. in Hermannus Alemannus, 'Translation of Averroes' "Middle Commentary"', ed. by Minnis and Scott, p. 293.

in the Averroistic *Poetics*, Hermann reports Aristotle as stressing the need for poets to present scenes 'quasi ante oculos constituta' ('as if set before our eyes'). At the equivalent of *Poetics*, c. 14 (1453b3–6) Hermann writes:

> Dixit. Et oportet ut sit fabularis adinventio pavorosa dolorosa inventio quasi ante oculos constituta, que quasi ex visu fidem habeat.

> [Aristotle says: Fictional invention intended to inspire grief or fear must be invention that is 'set before our eyes' so that it may convince us, as if we had actually seen the event happen.][26]

While at c. 17 (1455a22–26), Averroes writes:

> He said: the poetical narrative becomes excellent and attains utmost perfection when in describing the thing or incident taking place, the poet attains a level such that the listeners see it as though it were sense-perceptible and visible [Hermann: *ut rem narrantem quasi presentem sub sensu et aspectu auditorum ponat*], without its contrary occurring to them from this description.[27]

This is one of the more egregious changes from Aristotle's actual Greek text (and William of Moerbeke's neglected Latin translation of it), where in fact Aristotle is primarily stressing the need for the poet to engage in this sort of imaginative intensity: 'he should [...] put things before his eyes as he then sees the events most vividly as if he were actually present'.[28] (William of Moerbeke: 'Oportet enim fabulas consistere et locutione cooperari quam maxime pre oculis positum [...] sic enim utique efficacissime videns sicut apud ipsa gesta presens inveniet decens et minime utique latebunt que subcontraria'.)[29] In other words, Aristotle is emphasizing the need for the poet to be what Quintilian calls 'εὐφαντασίωτος' ('euphantasiotos': gifted with a vivid imagination).[30] But Aristotle's most widely circulating translation in the medieval Latin West is instead stressing the need for the poetry itself to create such effects in the mind of the reader, not in the mind of its creator. Along the way this change effec-

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[26] Hermannus Alemannus, *De arte poetica*, ed. by Minio-Paluello, p. 56; trans. in Hermannus Alemannus, 'Translation of Averroes' "Middle Commentary"', ed. by Minnis and Scott, pp. 305–06.

[27] Averroes, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. by Butterworth, pp. 108–09; Hermannus Alemannus, *De arte poetica*, ed. by Minio-Paluello, p. 62.

[28] Aristotle, 'Poetics', trans. by Hubbard, p. 72.

[29] Guillelmus de Morbeka, *Poetica*, p. 21.

[30] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, ed. by Radermacher, trans. by Butler, VI. 2. 29–31. Many of his aphorisms continued in circulation into the later Middle Ages.

tively removes authorial intention from the realm of the Poetic, liberating texts to generate imaginative responses in the audience that depend more on their potential for imaginative lability than on any inscribed authorial or even textual programme or agenda.

*Consideratio*, it turns out, is a key defining feature of this hybridized model of the Poetic. At two conceptual and linguistic removes (Averroes in Arabic and then Hermann in Latin), it replaces Aristotle's concept of 'spectacle' as special part of the theatrical force of a tragedy, which had been rendered (nontheatrically) by Averroes as:

> Spectacle is what explains the correctness of belief. It is as though it were for them a type of argumentation for the correctness of the eulogised belief.[31]

Averroes notes that this kind of theatrical spectacle is not found in the poems of the Arabs, but comments that this sort of argumentation is by no means the same as that used in rhetoric or legal argument. Picking up on this, Hermann glosses *consideratio* to mean:

> argumentatio seu probatio rectitudinis credulitatis aut operationis non per sermonem persuasivum (hoc enim non pertinet huic arte neque est conveniens ei), sed per sermonem representativum; ars nempe poetrie non est consistens in argumentationibus neque in speculatione considerativa.

> [the argument or proof of what is correct belief or correct behaviour, without using persuasive speech. For the last is not suitable or appropriate to this art [i.e. poetry] but operates by the use of a representational mode of speech. Indeed the art of poetry does not consist in arguments or in philosophical speculation.][32]

Persuasion 'non pertinet huic arte neque est conveniens ei'. So *consideratio* as a distinctive feature of poetry requires the reader or audience to engage in a process of primary imagination and secondary assessment rather than to be persuaded by the force of somebody else's persuasive words. It is the very metaphoricity of true poetry that requires the application of *consideratio* to it and that engages the audience in the imaginative work of responding to it. It is effective precisely because the self-contained and self-reflexive imaginative world of the genuinely Poetic avoids explicit attitudinizing and moralistic assertion. It all

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[31] Averroes, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. by Butterworth, pp. 76–77.

[32] Hermannus Alemannus, *De arte poetica*, ed. by Minio-Paluello, p. 49; trans. in Hermannus Alemannus, 'Translation of Averroes' "Middle Commentary"', ed. by Minnis and Scott, p. 296.

sounds rather familiar to readers of the radical playfulness of much medieval vernacular poetry.[33]

The true Poetic requires engaged interpretation not passive reception from its audience. For this reason the art of true Poetic is closer to philosophy than the art of inventing simplistic parables. Indeed, Averroes says:

> There is another kind of poetry here: namely the poems that fall more under the heading of convincing and persuading than under the heading of imitating and that are closer to rhetorical examples than to poetical representations.[34]

Hermann translates this as follows:

> Et sunt hic species alie poematis, que magis pertinent ad persuadendum vel ad faciendum fidem, quam ad faciendum imaginationem vel representationem poeticam. Et sunt propinquiores exemplis rethoricis quam metaphoris et representationibus poeticis.[35]

Aristotle, Averroes, and Hermann agree that verse proverbs (such as the *Disticha Catonis*) or collections of fables (such as those of Aesop and Avianus), widely found in collections of grammar school reading texts, whose *accessus* and commentaries have often been seen as key vectors of medieval literary theory, are not truly Poetic works because they posit passive receptivity or easy and linear performativity.[36] They lack the distinctive difficulty of 'the imaginative syllogism [...] leading to imaginative representation':

> Compositorum vero fabularum et proverbiorum opus non est opus poetarum, quamvis huiusmodi proverbia et fabulas adinventicias component sermone metrico; quamvis enim in metro communicent, tamen alterius eorum completur operatio

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[33] See, for example, my discussion in Gillespie, 'Lunatics, Lovers, and Poets'; Gillespie, 'Authorship'. On Chaucerian metapoetics, see recent explorations by Travis, *Disseminal Chaucer*; Fumo, *The Legacy of Apollo*; Workman, *Chaucer and the Death of the Political Animal*. For a different emphasis, see Johnson, *Practising Literary Theory in the Middle Ages*; Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender*. See also the works cited in note 36 below.

[34] Averroes, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. by Butterworth, p. 100.

[35] Hermannus Alemannus, *De arte poetica*, ed. by Minio-Paluello, p. 60.

[36] For a traditionally more positive view of this category of texts and their importance for the full spectrum of literary composition, see Mann, '"He knew nat Catoun"'; Cannon, 'The Middle English Writer's Schoolroom'; Cannon, 'Proverbs and the Wisdom of Literature'; Cannon, 'The Art of Rereading'; Cannon, 'From Literacy to Literature'. Cannon, *From Literacy to Literature* will be a major review of the impact of grammar school reading texts on vernacular composition.

intenta per fabulas etiam si sit absque metro; *et est instructio quedam prudentialis que acquiritur per tales adinventicias fabulas. Poeta vero non pertingit ad complementum propositi sui per ymaginativas commotiones nisi per metrum.* [...] ideo que ars poetrie propinquior est philosophie quam sit ars adinventicia proverbiorum.

[The composition of proverbs and fables is not the work of poets, although men compose proverbial tales and fables and such things in meter. Although they use meter, the effect of both proverbial tales and fables is achieved through the stories themselves as they would be even if meter were not used. *They convey a kind of instruction in prudence. The poet does not contribute to the achievement of this effect by stimulating the imagination, only by meter.* [...] Therefore the art of poetry is closer to philosophy than is the art of making up proverbial tales.][37]

The Poetic does not teach or persuade; it engages and stimulates. It is not a mode of persuasion; it is a mode of catalysis. In Hermann, the pleasurably riddling obscurity found in Poetic is called 'delight' (*delectatio*), perhaps deliberately aligning it with Horace's dictum.[38]

When looked at closely, the Averroistic *Poetics* is propounding a radical and edgy thesis, channelling the fundamental amorality of Arabic theory about the imaginative syllogism into the heart of a thirteenth-century intellectual milieu that was looking ever more closely at the nature and power of human cognitive functions.[39] The Arabic perception of the characteristic Aristotelian link between imagination, desire, and action was assimilated into and made intelligible for the mainstream of medieval psychological theory and moral philosophy, and for wider thinking about the force of poetry.[40] Because the Arabs had no drama, and because Hermann did not translate the examples from Arabic poetry provided by Averroes, Aristotle's dictums stand bare, and therefore resonate with a strongly metapoetic character. Unlike contemporary medieval arts

[37] Hermannus Alemannus, *De arte poetica*, ed. by Minio-Paluello, pp. 51–52; trans. from Hermannus Alemannus, 'Averroes (1126–1198)', ed. by Preminger, Hardison, and Kerrane, pp. 358–59 (this section is not translated in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Minnis and Scott). Compare Averroes, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. by Butterworth, p. 100; Aristotle, 'Poetics', trans. by Hubbard, p. 72.

[38] 'Aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare poete': Horace, *Ars Poetica*, ed. by Brink, ll. 333–34. Compare *Poetics*, c. 4; Hermannus Alemannus, 'Translation of Averroes' "Middle Commentary"', ed. by Minnis and Scott, pp. 293–94.

[39] As discussed, for example, by Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages*.

[40] For an overview of many of these issues, and for discussion on other important texts, such as Aristotle's *De Anima*, see Pasnau and Van Dyke, *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*; Kretzmann, Kenny, and Pinborg, *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*.

of poetry, they are not hedged about with textual illustrations but float free to be applied *ad libitum*. Moreover, nearly all these Averroistic aphorisms were extracted from Hermann's rendering to circulate in splendidly deracinated isolation in popular florilegial collections such as the *Tabula moralium* and other collections of Aristotelian *auctoritates*, where their influence would certainly have outstripped their significance in the context of Hermann's overall account of the Averroistic *Poetics*.[41]

It is therefore no surprise to find Averroistic ideas being adopted and incorporated into contexts where *ethice subponitur* was considered an overarching exegetical posture for dealing with literature, but it is important not to lose sight of the force of the underpinning ideas when they appear to be assimilated into the service of Christian moral philosophy. The thirteenth-century Franciscan Roger Bacon's writings on the force of literature were an important intervention into the arena of poetic theory and represent an idiosyncratic blending of the affective morality of Grosseteste and his followers with the Averroistic emphases of the Parisian academy.[42] Bacon blends the best of Oxford with the latest from Paris. And he does so in a precocious manner. Hermann the German's translation of the *Rhetoric* had reached Paris in 1256, and his later Averroistic *Poetics*, which Bacon certainly knew and used, followed shortly after. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* did not get commented on fully until Giles of Rome in the 1270s (a commentary that may have been influenced by Bacon's views on Poetic and Rhetoric),[43] and William of Moerbeke's version of the *Poetics* was not available until the 1280s. In his own writings, Bacon was freewheeling his way towards an eclectic and idiosyncratic theory of the psychology of poetic response, using what materials he had to hand and his own native intelligence, and working in the steely certainty that most of his Parisian contemporaries had got it wrong. Bacon believed that the theoretical and practical aspects of the study of poetry were parts of moral philosophy. Although operating under the flag of moral instruction, Bacon works hard to allow Poetic to retain its own distinctive discursive space. He looks to explore the ethical potential of literary texts, but in doing so he acknowledges the distinctive ability of the Poetic

[41]  Dahan, 'Notes et textes'.

[42]  For an overview, see Gillespie, 'From the Twelfth Century to *c.* 1450', pp. 169–71; Gillespie, 'The Senses in Literature', pp. 160–66; Hackett, *Roger Bacon and the Sciences*; Power, *Roger Bacon and the Defence of Christendom*; Bernardini and Rodolfi, *Roger Bacon's Communia Naturalium*. I am grateful to Daniel Orton for insightful discussion of these issues in Bacon.

[43]  Hackett, 'Roger Bacon on Rhetoric and Poetics', pp. 147–48.

to create an imaginative arena of unique virtuosity in which ethical acts may be performed by the reader or audience but will not be closely circumscribed by the moral demands of the text.

Bacon argues that Aristotle had asserted in the *Ethics* that moral science used rhetorical arguments rather than logical demonstration. Demonstration leads only to abstract knowledge of the good, and does not serve to 'flectere animum ad bonum' (turn the mind/soul to good).[44] But moral philosophy does not lie in such contemplation of abstract truths: its purpose is 'ut boni fiamus' — 'that we may become good'.[45] The knowledge of how to behave correctly is more difficult to acquire than abstract *sciencia*. Therefore 'argumenta sciencialis non sufficiunt morali' (arguments concerning knowledge do not suffice for morality).[46] Jessica Rosenfeld helpfully sums up the scholastic view typified by Bacon:

> For a human being to love ethically, to have a well-directed will, he or she must do more than act rationally; one must choose among many competing desires, and choose God despite the attractions of other competing objects. Choosing God out of clear-sightedness is simply not as morally admirable as choosing God and all attendant actions in a victory of the will that is pulled in many different directions, not all of them 'good'.[47]

The human being has more difficulty with the *operabilia* than with speculative knowledge. The practical intellect must be excited and provoked into moral action, and this is harder to do than to encourage the mind into abstract speculation. Speculative logic could have only a limited impact on moral behaviour because of its abstraction and difficulty and because of the defects of perception in man's fallen nature. Focusing his attention initially on the catch-all category of Rhetoric, as the liberal art that is concerned with deployment of language, Bacon gradually allows a distinctive vector of operation to emerge for the Poetic.

Rhetorical persuasion, he argues, has three functions in moral work: persuasion to belief, to good works, and to right judgement. For these to work in a rhetorical context, the audience must be docile, well-intentioned, and focused. One rhetorical *argumentum* (that is an exemplary display of persuasive art or an imaginative scenario) is worth a thousand logical demonstrations: this kind

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[44] Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, ed. by Massa, p. 251.

[45] Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, ed. by Massa, p. 250.

[46] Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, ed. by Massa, p. 250.

[47] Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry*, p. 118.

of writing moves the practical intellect by moving the soul. But an *argumentum* of this sort is actually an appeal to the emotions rather than to the intellect. Therefore the audience must be helped by the text 'per delectationem' (by delight).[48] Delight is, of course, a distinctive feature of the Horatian view of poetry (*prodesse et delectare*), as well as a key category in the Averroistic *Poetics*. So this modality of rhetorical persuasion, privileging the use of the constructed example, actually stands closer to the modality of Poetry than it does to the demonstrative mode of Rhetoric. In part V of the *Moralis philosophia*, he talks about a special part of Rhetoric which, he says, Aristotle and other philosophers call 'poetic' because poetic truths are used 'in flectendo homines ad virtutum honestatem' (in persuading men to the honesty of virtue).[49] He then cites the usual core Horatian aphorism as if in confirmation of a discursive truism.

Bacon stresses the necessary engagement of the will and affections of the reader in a process of sensual and imaginative response leading subsequently to intellectual assessment and finally but only potentially to ethical judgement and classification.[50] As the Arab theorists had stressed, sublime and decorous words have the power to carry away the soul to love the good and detest the bad. Bacon cites Al-Farabi as teaching that such persuasions work through the beauty of their representation 'ut subito rapiatur animus ad consenciendum' (that the soul may be suddenly ravished to agreement [or fellow feeling]).[51] This is Averroistic *imaginatio* as opposed to rhetorical persuasion. Therefore the moving of the audience's mind or soul (*flectere animum*) by *imaginatio* and towards *assimilatio* and *consideratio* emerges as a distinctive difference between the nature of an audience's response to Rhetoric and Poetic. The Poetic can move the soul 'subito' (suddenly) 'sine praevisione' (without forethought or prevision).[52] This echoes what Averroes had said about Poetic working without deliberation and appealing to the imagination before the deliberative processes have been able to cut in. Its peculiar power to generate metaphorical situations and places and people gives it great potential to be co-opted in an Augustinian

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[48] Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, ed. by Massa, p. 251.

[49] Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, ed. by Massa, p. 255.

[50] See Bacon, *Opus maius*, ed. by Bridges, v. 1. 4., v. 10. 3, VII. 4; also see Massa, 'Ruggero Bacone e la "Poetica" di Aristotele' and Massa, *Ruggero Bacone*.

[51] Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, ed. by Massa, p. 254. Cf. Rosier-Catach, *La Parole comme acte*; Bériou, Boudet, and Rosier-Catach, *Le Pouvoir des mots au Moyen Âge*, pp. 225–38, 511–88; Luscombe, 'Roger Bacon and Language'; Bourgain, 'Les Sens de la langue et des langues chez Roger Bacon'.

[52] Bacon, *Opus maius*, ed. by Bridges, IV. 1. 2.

*spoliatio Egyptorum* as an instrument of ethical and moral exploration. While Bacon was interested in the indirectness and the suddenness of an audience's response to poetic stimuli, he also adds an ethical gloss to the Arab theories. Whereas they had been interested in the fundamental amorality of the imaginative syllogism, Bacon wants to stress that the well-motivated Christian reader of his own time will use those syllogisms to engage in an ethical consideration and assessment of the syllogisms, and will arrive at an appropriate moral judgement informed by their Christian values. In the *Communia mathematica*, he writes of poetic argument:

> Et secundum Aristotilem et secundum quod exponit Alpharabius, hoc argumentum utitur sermonibus pulchris et in fine decoris, ut rapiatur animus subito in amorem virtutis et felicitatis, et in odium vicii.

> [According to Aristotle and Al-Farabi, this argument makes use of beautiful and decorous speech so that the soul will be immediately raised to the love of virtue and happiness and to the hatred of vice.][53]

Sublime and decorous words have the power to carry away the soul to love the good and detest the bad. In this respect, he says, scripture and moral philosophy rely on the same kind of poetical argument.[54]

Bacon's application of a second-order ethical veneer to the *sermo potens* of the Poetic is reflected in other texts that had a far greater circulation and impact. Even the 'king of the compilers', Vincent of Beauvais, cites Al-Farabi when he argues for the distinctiveness of the category of the Poetic in his universal encyclopaedia:

> Poeticae proprium est sermonibus suis facere imaginari, aliquid pulchrum vel foedum, quod non est ita, ut auditor credat et aliquid abhorreat vel appetat. Quamvis cum certum sit non esse in veritate, animi tamen audientium eriguntur ad horrendum vel appetendum quod imaginatur.[55]

> [The special business of poetry is, by its utterances, to make people imagine something to be more beautiful or repulsive than it really is, in such a way that the hearer,

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[53] Bacon, *Communia mathematica*, ed. by Steele, p. 17; trans. in Hackett, 'Roger Bacon on Rhetoric and Poetics', p. 136.

[54] Massa, 'Ruggero Bacone e la "Poetica" di Aristotele', pp. 466–67, and Massa, *Ruggero Bacone*. See also Hackett, 'Roger Bacon on Rhetoric and Poetics'.

[55] Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum doctrinale*, c. CIX, col. 287, in *Speculum maius*. For recent scholarship, see Lusignan, Paulmier-Foucart, and Duchenne, *Lector et compilator*; Lusignan, Paulmier-Foucart, and Nadeau, *Vincent de Beauvais*.

believing, will either shun or seek it (*abhorreat vel appetat*). Although it is certainly not in truth (*in veritate*) yet the minds of the listeners will be raised either to shun or seek what they imagine.]

But such a potentially ethical response to a poetic text need not imply or assume an ethical intent on the part of that text. The special business of poetry, even for the arch-ethicist Vincent, is imagination. Albert the Great, early in a long line of Dominican sceptics about the moral dangers of poetic acts, nevertheless accepts the imaginative force of the Poetic:

> Aliter etiam est in poeticis, quae ex fictis et imaginative movere intendit ad delectationem vel abominationem vel appetitum vel amorem vel odium [...] ut demulceat auditum, ut facilius provocetur.[56]

> [It is otherwise in the Poetic, which proceeds by fictions and by the imagination, it intends to move a person to delight, or to loathing, or desire, or love, or hatred [...] having been heard it soothes, so that it rouses easily.]

The Parisian interest in the Averroistic *Poetics*, evinced by Bacon, Albert the Great, and even Aquinas, is confirmed by the survival of a set of glosses, of extra-curricular lectures given by Bartholomew of Bruges in 1307, and of an anonymous *quaestio* on the nature of poetry. This later Parisian study of the *Poetics* continues to focus on the imaginative force and ethical potential of poetic texts.[57] *Delectatio*, the ambiguous partner of Horace's *utilitas*, is shown to be an essential part of the literary experience because it engages the imagination and the estimative faculty. Bartholomew of Bruges assembles examples from elsewhere in the Aristotelian corpus to explore the workings of the rational soul and its susceptibility to imaginative manipulation. Restating a now well-trodden distinction, he states that Rhetoric persuades while poetry teaches by generating acts of imagination or supposition (*existimatio*). Rhetoric is a communal form; Poetic — which is private, in that it depends on the individual's imaginative response — is philosophically a lesser activity but potentially more powerful. Unlike demonstrative words, which show things as they are, Poetic words operate by *assimilatio* because they do not directly express things exactly as they are. The *imaginatio* is provoked by the images or similitudes used in the representation, and by the riddling element of the indirect and metaphorical modes of expression typically used by poetry. Assessment follows from this

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[56] Albertus Magnus, *Super Porphyrium de V uniuersalibus*, ed. by Santos Noya, p. 16. I owe this reference to Daniel Orton.

[57] For discussion and texts, see Dahan, 'Notes et textes'.

imaginative act in the process of assimilation and consideration. Bartholomew sums up his views in the aphorism 'sermo poeticus est sermo assimilativus et ymaginativus' (a poetic word is an assimilative and imaginative word).[58]

Poetry makes us imagine and makes us generate likenesses, parallels, and similitude between the world of the text and the world we live in. We must, in the Chaucerian term, 'assay' the text. The ethical decisions and moral judgements are not already encoded in the text or ready for unproblematic downloading. William of Aragon in his *Commentary on the Consolation of Philosophy* argues that 'inter alia entia solus homo indiget exercitio in agendo et doctrina in eligendo ut directe et sine errore in bonum proprium moveatur' ('man alone, out of all other creatures, needs practice in acting, and needs to be taught in the matter of exercising his choice so that he can be brought closer to what is good for him by a direct route and without deviation').[59] Poetry offers us that practice and presents us with those choices by which ethical decisions can be arrived at. But it does so precisely by its indirection and its challenge to interpret and judge. And, of course, because the Poetic is private and individual in its imaginative effects, it need not necessarily and only be read to that ethical end. This is its danger.

The anonymous *quaestio* is even more explicit on the distinctions between Rhetoric and Poetic. The Poetic operates on a more personal and intuitive level than Rhetoric:

> Et quia quilibet propriis estimationibus maxime credit et propriis fantasiis maxime innititur, ideo sermo poeticus seu sillogismus poeticus ymaginativus a philosopho appellatur.

> [Because everyone has most trust in his own instinctive estimations and relies particularly on his own imaginings, poetic discourse or poetic syllogism is therefore called by the Philosopher 'imaginative'.][60]

> Illa [rethorica] magis modum tradit circa actus iudiciales et cogi possibiles, hec [ars poetica] autem circa actus magis voluntarios [...] et illa per victoriam intendit partem adversam a vicio reducere, hec autem per laudem et instigationem intendit ad virtutem auditores inducere.

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[58] Bartholomew of Bruges, *Expositio supra Poetriam*, ed. by Dahan, p. 227.

[59] William of Aragon, 'Commentary on Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*', ed. by Terbille, p. 2; trans. in William of Aragon, 'Commentary on Boethius', ed. by Minnis and Scott, p. 329.

[60] *Questio in Poetriam*, ed. by Dahan, pp. 215–16; trans. in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Minnis and Scott, p. 309.

[Rhetoric lays down guidelines in relation to actions which are subject to justice, and to compulsion, but poetry [does so] in relation to acts that are of a more voluntary nature. [...] The purpose of Rhetoric is to make the opposing side abandon vice by vanquishing it. But the purpose of poetry is to win its listeners to the practice of virtue through praise and encouragement.][61]

Rhetoric aims at the common good, and because this is more important than the individual good it preceded poetry in the classification of the logical sciences (i.e. the *Organon*). 'Principalius est bono singulari intento per poetriam' ('Poetry seems more useful for educating anyone individually to live by what is right').[62] Echoing Al-Farabi's comment that the Poetic incites, inclines, and instigates the audience towards a judgement rather than persuading them, the *quaestio* claims that poetry is a special kind of logic because it 'estimationem [facit] quamdam debilem inclinantem solum ad aliquid appetendum vel aliquid fugiendum' ('produces a certain weak attraction which merely inclines someone to desire something or to avoid something').[63] Nevertheless it has particular merit because it 'magis est applicabilis ad moralia' ('is more applicable to moral realities').[64]

The affective force of poetry justifies its use for the exploration of moral issues, therefore, but only if the fundamental principles of ethics are already encoded in the intellect of its audience. True poetic syllogisms retain their inherent amorality alongside their powerful imaginative potential. Their mode of procedure and outcomes are different from those found in proverbs and simple fables. Indeed the category of the Poetic as an imaginative scenario might also exclude a lot of often mechanistic personification allegory and ekphrastic narrative. Many dialogues and trialogues (such as the *Eclogues of Theodulus*, often found in collections of grammar school reading texts) might also struggle to be seen as truly Poetic, given their lack of a thick imaginative scenario and their similarity to scholastic acts of rhetorical or dialectical disputation. By contrast, genuinely poetic syllogisms are both innocent in terms of operating according to any explicit or implicit moral purpose, and endlessly promiscuous

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[61] *Questio in Poetriam*, ed. by Dahan, p. 217; trans. in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Minnis and Scott, pp. 311–12.

[62] *Questio in Poetriam*, ed. by Dahan, p. 218; trans. in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Minnis and Scott, p. 312.

[63] *Questio in Poetriam*, ed. by Dahan, p. 219; trans. in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Minnis and Scott, p. 313.

[64] *Questio in Poetriam*, ed. by Dahan, p. 217; trans. in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Minnis and Scott, p. 311.

in terms of the plethora of interpretative couplings they will tolerate. Book III of Chaucer's *House of Fame* suggests that this was a poetic truth that he had come to understand.

Around 1330, the Parisian *Poetics* of Matthias of Linköping (who, perhaps significantly, later went on to become confessor to the prophetic visionary Bridget of Sweden) reasserted that 'visualisation' was the distinctive feature of poetic imagination, presenting events 'as if it seems to pass vividly before our eyes' ('tanquam ante oculos fieri videatur') through vivid *representatio* and *assimilatio* or poetic likening.[65] Matthias points to the underlying Aristotelianism of the idea of *representatio*, as throughout his *Poetria* he draws heavily on the Averroistic *Poetics* as translated by Hermann the German. 'Ponitur autem res ante oculos, quando inducitur tanquam presencialiter operans, sicut in *Testa nucis* plenius ab Aristotile assumpsimus' ('A thing is set before our eyes, he argues, when it is introduced as creating an impression of actuality, as we have described in *The Nutshell* with Aristotle as source').[66] Poetry proceeds 'non per raciones aut persuasiones' ('not, however, through rational arguments or persuasions'), the methods of Rhetoric, 'sed per representaciones' ('but through visualizations'):[67]

> Differt [...] laus poetica a laude rethorica, quoniam laus rethorica habet fieri per persuasiones et enthymemata in sermone prosayca, laus autem poetica habet fieri per representacionem in sermone metrico factam.
>
> [The poetic eulogy [...] differs from the rhetorical praise, since the rhetorical praise is carried out through persuasions and enthymemes in prose, whereas the poetic praise is characterized by visualization in verse.][68]

Imagination is of the essence of poetry, he argues ('sola quidem representacio est de esse poetria' — 'visualization alone is an essential part of poetry').[69] Everything in the Poetic exists in an imaginative *quasi*. And the imagination is powered and stimulated by poetic devices, and especially by metaphors which are 'preciosissime poematis falere' ('the most precious gems in a poem') because (unlike direct similes) they require decoding and assimilation by the audi-

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[65] Matthias of Linköping, *Testa nucis and Poetria*, ed. and trans. by Bergh, p. 8; for discussion, see Minnis, 'Acculturizing Aristotle'.

[66] Matthias of Linköping, *Testa nucis and Poetria*, ed. and trans. by Bergh, p. 11.

[67] Matthias of Linköping, *Testa nucis and Poetria*, ed. and trans. by Bergh, p. 66.

[68] Matthias of Linköping, *Testa nucis and Poetria*, ed. and trans. by Bergh, p. 34.

[69] Matthias of Linköping, *Testa nucis and Poetria*, ed. and trans. by Bergh, p. 7.

ence, the Averroistic processes of *consideratio* and *assimilatio*.[70] This informs Matthias's description of *consideratio*:

> Non est nisi ostensio dubiorum et hoc non per raciones aut persuasiones (quoniam hoc non spectat ad poetam) sed per representaciones tam certe et veraciter factas, ut non credatur res ficta esse.

> [It is nothing but the presentation of uncertain things — not however through rational arguments or persuasions (since this is not the poet's business) but through visualization so certain and plausible that the matter does not seem to have been made up.][71]

*Ostensio dubiorum* — the presentation of uncertain things — places the onus on the audience to assess, assay, and judge the *dubia* presented to it, and to come to some ethical assessment of it. The true Poetic text does not take a moral position but leaves room for endless interrogation and interpretation.

We have seen how the poet's ability to present vivid scenes 'quasi ante oculos constituta' is a key feature of the distinctive force of the Poetic as presented in the Averroistic *Poetics* translated by Hermann and in the *Poetics* of Matthias of Linköping. But, shorn of the psychological underpinning of Aristotelian thought, this defining concept had already long been part of the exegetical and educative toolkit of late antique arts of composition, by which route it made its way not only to the poets of the High Middle Ages but also to its literary theorists and to its scriptural exegetes. It is a fundamental assumption in the powerful medieval tradition of commentary on the *Ars Poetria* or *Ad Pisonem* of Horace, with its well-worn aphorism *ut pictura poesis* a nodal point for reflections on the imaginative force of the poetic text.[72] Quintilian, in offering advice to orators and rhetoricians, had argued that 'adeo velut spiritus operis huius atque animus est in adfectibus' ('it is in the power over the emotions that the life and soul of oratory is to be found'), but he goes beyond the pragmatically rhetorical rehearsal of the facts of the case to discuss the power of language to appeal to many different senses and to stimulate the imagination to make

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[70] Matthias of Linköping, *Testa nucis and Poetria*, ed. and trans. by Bergh, p. 22.

[71] Matthias of Linköping, *Testa nucis and Poetria*, ed. and trans. by Bergh, p. 66.

[72] For basic discussion of the blending of Aristotle's and Horace's views on poetry, and for references to the extensive bibliography on medieval commentary on Horace, see Gillespie, 'From the Twelfth Century to *c.* 1450', pp. 160–68; Gillespie, 'Lunatics, Lovers and Poets'; Chronopoulos, 'The Ethics of Horace'; Parsons, '"A Riotous Spray of Words"'. The classic study, Reynolds, *Medieval Reading*, is still worth consulting.

things absent appear as if present, thereby transfiguring the experience towards that of the Poetic:

> quas φαντασίας Graeci vocant (nos sane visiones appellemus), per quas imagines rerum absentium ita repraesentantur animo, ut eas cernere oculis ac praesentes habere videamur, has quisquis bene conceperit, is erit in adfectibus potentissimus. quidam dicunt εὐφαντασίωτον, qui sibi res, voces, actus secundum verum optime finget: quod quidem nobis volentibus facile continget. nisi vero inter otia animorum et spes inanes et velut somnia quaedam vigilantium ita nos hae, de quibus loquor, imagines prosecuntur, ut peregrinari, navigare, proeliari, populos adloqui, divitiarum, quas non habemus, usum videamur disponere, nec cogitare, sed facere: hoc animi vitium ad utilitatem non transferemus? hominem occisum queror: non omnia, quae in re praesenti accidisse credibile est, in oculis habebo? non percussor ille subitus erumpet? non expavescet circumventus? exclamabit vel rogabit vel fugiet? non ferientem, non concidentem videbo? non animo sanguis et pallor et gemitus, extremus denique expirantis hiatus insidet?

> [There are certain experiences which the Greeks call φαντασίαι [phantasiai], and the Romans *visions*, whereby things absent are presented to our imagination with such extreme vividness that they seem actually to be before our very eyes. It is the man who is really sensitive to such impressions who will have the greatest power over the emotions. Some writers describe the possessor of this power of vivid imagination, whereby things, words and actions are presented in the most realistic manner, by the Greek word εὐφαντασίωτος [euphantasiotos: gifted with a vivid imagination]; and it is a power which all may readily acquire if they will. When the mind is unoccupied or is absorbed by fantastic hopes or day-dreams, we are haunted by these visions of which I am speaking to such an extent that we imagine that we are travelling abroad, crossing the sea, fighting, addressing the people, or enjoying the use of wealth that we do not actually possess, and seem to ourselves not to be dreaming but acting. Surely, then, it may be possible to turn this form of hallucination to some profit. I am complaining that a man has been murdered. Shall I not bring before my eyes all the circumstances which it is reasonable to imagine must have occurred in such a connexion? Shall I not see the assassin burst suddenly from his hiding-place, the victim tremble, cry for help, beg for mercy, or turn to run? Shall I not see the fatal blow delivered and the stricken body fall? Will not the blood, the deathly pallor, the groan of agony, the death-rattle, be indelibly impressed upon my mind?][73]

These effects are, he argues, a core part of the sensual impact of literature, its *enargeia*:

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[73] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, ed. by Radermacher, trans. by Butler, VI. 2. 7 and VI. 2. 29–31.

From such impressions arises that ἐνάργεια which Cicero calls *illustratio* and *evidentia*, which makes us seem not so much to narrate as to exhibit the actual scene, while our emotions will be no less actively stirred than if we were present at the actual occurrence.[74]

As in the analyses of Bacon and other medieval thinkers about the force of language, this discussion of *enargeia* refers to a particular subset of rhetorical language which effectively aligns itself with the modes and procedures of Poetic as defined in the Averroistic tradition. Literary impact is created by the presentation of a *phantasia*, but can only be adequately generated when presented with a particular clarity of imaginative manifestation (*enargeia*/*declaratio*) that is distinctive and permits *katalepsis* or *comprehensio* on the part of the audience.

Reflections of this are found everywhere: the thirteenth-century pre-humanist Richard de Fournival's *Bestiaire d'Amours*, written just as Hermannus Alemannus and Roger Bacon were broadening the field of Averroistic Poetics, opens with the Aristotelian assertion that 'All men naturally desire knowledge', and proceeds to explore how Depiction and Description bring events vividly before our eyes by the power of their imaginative force:

Quant on voit painte une estoire ou de Troies ou d'autre, on voit les fais des preudommes ki cha en ariere furent ausi con s'il fiussent present. Et tout ensi est il de parole. Car quant on ot .ï. romans lire, on entent les aventures ausi com on les veist en present.

[For when one sees the depiction of a history of Troy or of some other place, one sees the deeds of those past heroes as if they were present. And so it is with Description. When one hears a romance read, one hears the adventures as if one saw them in the present.][75]

This imaginative vividness, this gifted imagination, generates strong reactions in the mind of the reader or hearer and allows them to become co-creators of the phantasm generated in the imagination. In essence, there is nothing moral or ethical about the generative phase of this imaginative process.

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[74] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, ed. by Radermacher, trans. by Butler, VI. 2. 32. On the importance of *enargeia*, see Zanker, 'Enargeia in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry'; Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, pp. 130–41; Vogt-Spira, 'Senses, Imagination, and Literature'; Plett, *Enargeia in Classical Antiquity and the Early Modern Age*; Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition*; Eden, *Poetic and Legal Fiction in the Aristotelian Tradition*; Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, pp. 80–107.

[75] Richard de Fournival, *Li bestiaires d'amours*, ed. by Segre, pp. 4–5; *Master Richard's 'Bestiary of Love'*, trans. by Beer, p. 2.

Although the Latin terms used to describe this process varied through the medieval period (occurring in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, John of Garland, and Geoffrey de Vinsauf as well as extensively in Horatian commentaries and in various Ciceronian texts that became more widely read), the underlying concept seems to have been remarkably stable.[76] The special literary force of the Poetic is that it uses the imaginative syllogism, and releases the special *enargeia* of poetry. Poetry is about visualization in verse, not about morality. Imaginative syllogisms are inherently amoral. In texts which operate by means of poetic affectivity and the 'imaginative syllogism', the reader is involved in an immediate, pre-deliberative, and proactive response which only later leads to appraisal. This is in contrast to the reactive response of acquiescence usually sought by a rhetorical or homiletic discourse, or by catechetic and moral teaching. The nature of the imaginative experience being presented in poetry will always be more complicated and, before it can be made to support an ethical classification, it will always be in need of second-order interpretation against personal moral and ethical values and principles already encoded in the estimative faculties of the audience. It is up to the reader or hearer to yearn for the good or to flee from the bad, if they so choose, on the basis of their imaginative response and their subsequent assessment of the evidence before their eyes (and *evidentia* is the term that humanist theorists like Rudolf Agricola (d. 1485) use most often to describe *enargeia*).[77]

The relationship between poetry and real life is always indirect, even if the Poetic trades in an imaginative landscape that is in some sort of sense true and credible. The Poetic operates by metaphor and indirect similitude, creating imaginative force. The imaginative success of poetry depends on the degree to which it achieves a plausible likeness of human issues, situations, and moral dilemmas. But the ethical success of a poetic text is a second-order outcome. If readers are able to see metonymies of the kinds of ethical discernment needed in real life, all well and good, but the Poetic absolutely does not require or depend on them doing so. So, although it is possible for medieval commentators to claim that the Poetic supports and pertains to ethics, it is never a straightforward co-optation to a specific moral agenda, and is always the result of a process of assimilating the similitudes, of decoding the issues at work in a particular text. The ethics of poetry in high medieval literary theory is always

[76] On *artes poetriae et rhetoricae*, see most recently Ruys, Ward, and Heyworth, *The Classics in the Medieval and Renaissance Classroom*; Woods, *Classroom Commentaries*; Camargo, *Essays on Medieval Rhetoric*; Carruthers, *Rhetoric Beyond Words*.

[77] Plett, *Enargeia in Classical Antiquity and the Early Modern Age*, pp. 58–59.

more about internal self-calibration than about external social policing. But the Poetic is never compromised and never exhausted by the attempts of readers to interpret it, to traverse it, and to colonize it. The *enargeia* of the Poetic remains inviolably an act of imaginative stimulation, and nothing more. Avicenna said, 'In poetical syllogisms, you only heed things that are imaginative': at its most ambitiously abstract, the entire category of the Poetic is a gigantic thought experiment. If, as Quintilian argues, the gift of vivid imagination 'is a power which all may readily acquire if they will', then every reader or hearer has the ability or potential to become εὐφαντασίωτος (euphantasiotos: gifted with a vivid imagination). As Don Paterson says, in words that would have resonated with the Arab theorists:

> Poetry is a dark art, a form of magic, because it tries to change the way we perceive the world. That is to say that it aims to make the texture of our perception malleable. It does so by surreptitious and devious means, by seeding and planting things in the memory and imagination of the reader with such force and insidious originality that they cannot be deprogrammed [...]. They are — and poems remain — invocatory forms. Prose evokes; the well chosen word describes the thing. But poetry invokes; the memorable word conjures the subject from the air.[78]

That is the richness and the risk of the Poetic. There is no such thing as an ethical Poetic, only ethical readers.

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[78] Paterson, 'The Dark Art of Poetry', p. 1.

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